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KANSAS KING;

Or, THE RED RIGHT HAND.

By BUFFALO BILL.

CHAPTER I.

RED-HAND, THE SCOUT.

Above a dark mass of storm-clouds, gathered in the western skies, peeps a brilliant ray from the declining sun, which penetrates far into the deepest recesses of a rocky gorge, hidden away in the mountain fastnesses of the Black Hills.

And yet, into that retreat of the red-man one pale-face has dared to intrude, for the ray of sunlight falls full upon the tall and sinewy form of a white man, clad in buckskin, and with his bold, handsome features shaded beneath a broad felt hat, looped up upon the left side with a small pin, cut from the purest red coral, and exquisitely carved to represent a human hand, the fingers shut tight excepting the forefinger, which pointed straight out, as if directing the way to be pursued.

It was a strangely handsome face upon which the sunlight fell. The skin was darkly bronzed, and a mass of old-brown hair fell nearly down to his waist, while his face was beardless, excepting a moustache, and every feature was perfect, the eyes being particularly lustrous.

Lying at the feet of the man was a hunter's knapsack, while in his belt were a brace of revolvers and a large hunting knife.

As he stood there in the sunlight, his hunter's pack at his feet, his hands resting on the muzzle of his rifle, the right above the left, it was observable that the former was almost blood-red in hue.

Had the hunter thus alone in the Black Hills



THE SCOUT CUT WITH HIS KNIFE THE NAME OF THE MAN HE HAD SLAIN,
AND THE DATE OF HIS DEATH.

been born with that blood-red hand? Or, had the hand been stained thus for some deadly deed it had done in the past?

Reader, let the sequel unfold to you the history of Red-Hand, the Scout.

CHAPTER II.

A DEADLY RECOGNITION.

As Red-Hand, the Scout, thus stood in the deep gorge of the mountains there suddenly came to his ears the sound of some object breaking through the thick underbrush that fringed the left of the gorge.

Quickly his pack was slung upon his back, a bound carried him to the shelter of a tree near by, and the daring man stood at bay.

Suddenly a large stag bounded out into full view, and directly behind the flying animal came another form that brought a flush of surprise to his face, for there stood before him one of his own race.

Bounding out into the clearing, the stranger directly raised his rifle, and then came the flash and sharp report, the death-knell of the flying stag.

Ere the rattling echoes of the rifle had died away there broke forth upon the air one long, loud, terrible cry of mingled joy and rage, and Red-Hand, the Scout, bounded from behind his sheltering tree; his rifle fairly leaped to his shoulder, a bright burst of flame from the muzzle, a ringing report, and the hunter who had slain the stag threw up his arms, clutched wildly at the air, and with a

groan fell dead upon the velvet grass, the life-blood streaming from a ragged wound in his broad breast.

With rapid strides the Scout advanced and stood over the prostrate form of the man he had slain, and into his face crept a look that was hard to fathom, for there dwelt there hatred, sorrow, triumph, and remorse, all commingled.

Though limp and stiffening with death, the form was of splendid proportions, and clad in a full suit of buck-skin.

The head was sheltered by a soft felt hat, beneath which were clusters of dark curls clinging around the neck, while the face, pale and lifeless, was most striking in appearance and had doubtless once been exceedingly handsome, ere the stamp of reckless dissipation had been set thereon.

By his side lay a Spencer rifle, and in his belt were revolvers and knife, none of which had served him when face to face with the man who had taken his life, and who stood for long moments regarding him, his face each moment growing more bitter and stern.

At length the lips of Red-Hand, the Scout, quivered slightly, parted, and he said, half aloud:

"At last we have met, Boyd Bernard; you and I!

"Yes, met, here, in the very heart of the wilderness—how different from our last meeting, seven years ago.

"Yes, met! you to fall dead at my feet, and your soul hurled into the bottomless pit by my hand.

"Dead, Boyd Bernard! ay, dead you are, for my aim never fails, especially when the muzzle of my rifle covered your heart.

"A strange fate brought your footsteps hither! A strange destiny led me alone into these wilds where I believed the pale-face never came.

"Your fate led you to death! my destiny led me to avenge; but, oh God! it is terrible to see you lie there, slain by my hand, Boyd Bernard, and for the sake of the olden time I will not leave you here to be torn limb from limb by wild beasts.

"No; I will bury you yonder beneath that sheltering tree, and the shrill winds that sweep through this gorge will be your only requiem—a grave in the wilderness your only tomb."

A moment longer the scout stood, silently and painfully musing, and then the night shadows creeping on, warned him to commence his work.

Unslung, from a loop behind his belt, a small but serviceable hatchet, he began to dig a grave in the soft earth beneath a sheltering tree.

An hour's work, and he had descended to a sufficient depth, and seeking the thicket, he cut a number of poles just the length of the grave.

Then the stiffened form was tenderly raised and laid in its earthly bed, the feet toward the rising sun, and above it the poles were placed and securely fastened, for the Scout knew that wild beasts would attempt to rob the grave of its human occupant.

Carefully and compactly the grave was filled, and then, in the smooth bark of the tree at its head, the scout cut with his knife the name of the man he had slain and the date of his death.

It read:

"BOYD BERNARD,
BORN IN
Portsmouth, N. H., January 1st, 1833.
SLAIN IN
The Black Hills, July 10th, 1896."

As the scout cut the last figure in the inscription, the darkness of night came upon the valley, while far above, on the eastward slope of the hills, was visible the rosy tinge of the departed sunshine, and upon the summit of the western mountains was the mellow light of the rising moon, tinged with silvery radiance the forest-clad scenery, grand in its gloom, desolation and death-like silence.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING APPARITION.

HAVING completed his sad task, Red-Hand, the Scout, replaced his hatchet in its sling, shouldered his traps, and with a moan of bitter anguish crushed back through his shut teeth, started down the valley, with steps slow and uncertain, as if he hardly cared whither he went.

A walk of half a mile, and he came to a precipitous hillside, which suddenly brought him to a halt and recalled him to himself, for he glanced quickly around, and then said:

"Why, this is the way I came into the gorge—I am strangely moody to-night; and no won-

der, when, two hours ago, my hand took the life of Boyd Bernard.

"Well, I must away from here, and—yes, I must again pass his grave.

"Oh! that I had been less quick in my shot, or less true in my aim, and then his lips would not have been forever sealed, and he could have told me of her; but I forgot—she is dead—ay, forever dead to me, even though she were living.

"And in what land lies her fair form which once I so loved to hold close to my heart!

"Did I know where was her grave, I would seek it even to the uttermost parts of the earth, for, guilty though she was, I loved her—yes, love her still—and above her last resting-place would gladly kneel.

"But he is dead, too, and my hand forever sealed his lips—Hark!"

As the Scout paused suddenly in his walk, there burst forth upon the crisp air the sound of a voice in song.

It was a beautiful, clear voice, but it sounded strangely weird-like there in that wild gorge, and, spell-bound, Red-Hand stood and listened as the echoes broke upon the hillsides and swept on down the valley.

It was a woman's voice, and like one in a dream stood the Scout, as she trilled forth in rich tones a song unfamiliar to his ears, but the words of which sunk deep into his heart, and clear and sweet rung the refrain:

"In dreams I sigh for those dark eyes
That ever lit with love for me;
But they are veiled, their light is gone,
And sorrow's night-shades gather fast,
As through the vale I'm borne along—
An autumn leaf upon the blast."

Like a startled fawn, Red-Hand, the Scout, stood in silence, and then his eyes became suddenly fixed upon a form that appeared upon a rocky shelf, overhanging the tree, beneath which was the new-made grave of Boyd Bernard.

Upon that shelf of rock suddenly appeared a slender form—a woman's, clad in a garb of white, and adown her back hung heavy masses of golden hair.

The moon had risen above the eastern hills, and poured a full flood of light directly upon her, and distinctly Red-Hand beheld the beautiful, sad face, the large eyes glancing down into the gloom of the gorge beneath, as if to penetrate the dark secret buried there.

Then the song ceased, with the words, "An autumn leaf upon the blast," and the clear voice called out in tones that again startled the silent depths:

"Boyd! Boyd Bernard! Come!"

With a startled cry of fear, wrung from his brave heart, Red-Hand, the Scout, turned and dashed away at mad speed adown the gloomy gorge, his staring eyes ever and anon turned behind him as he ran, as though expecting to see upon his path a pursuing phantom, a being of the other world.

With the peed of a deer he sped along, his teeth shut close, his hands fiercely clenching his rifle, his breath drawn quick and hard, and his whole being wrought up to a pitch of terrible excitement by what he had seen, the terrible apparition that had come upon him in that wild gorge of the Black Hills.

Thus miles were passed over, and yet, through the long hour of the lonely night, he pressed on, until the morning sun found him far away from the scene where had occurred the fatal recognition of Boyd Bernard, and where, as if in punishment for his deed of blood, had appeared before him a very phantom of the mountains.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE GRAVE OF HIS FOE.

FIVE years have passed since Red-Hand, the Scout, fled in superstitious awe from the Black Hill country, leaving behind him a grave, to mark his footsteps through the wild wilderness, far beyond the confines of civilization.

Again the sunlight falls aslant the rocky gorge, as upon that afternoon, five years before, and the forest-clad hills are budding forth with the tender leaves of spring, and the birds trill merrily amid their emerald coverts.

Again the sunlight falls upon the form of a pale-face hunter, who is standing beside the grave of Boyd Bernard, above which the green grass is growing, and the budding leaves of the sheltering tree cast long shadows.

The inscription yet remains, worn by the time that has gone by, and upon this the eye of the hunter sadly rests.

Though five years have passed they have left no trace of their footsteps upon the face of the Scout, excepting to make the features harder

and sterner, for the man thus standing by the grave of Boyd Bernard is none other than Red-Hand, who had once fled precipitately from the spot, as if in very fear.

He is dressed pretty nearly as upon his former visit to the gorge, his black felt hat still looped up with the red coral band, though his knife and revolver are of a newer pattern, and his rifle is one of Evans' improved repeaters, capable of firing thirty-five times without reloading.*

When, five years before, Red-Hand, the Scout, fled from the Black Hills, he believed he would never again profane its unknown fastnesses with his footsteps; but as time passed on and the eyes of adventurers and hunters were turned toward the country now called the "Miner's New Eldorado," a small band of hardy men determined to penetrate into its unexplored depths, and seek there the golden fortunes said to lie buried beneath the rocky hills.

The guide of that brave band was Red-Hand, the Scout, for he was well known along the frontier, and one of the most daring men on the border, and his skill in wood and prairie craft, and ability to outwit Indian cunning, had gained him a widespread reputation among the bold bordermen and the soldiers of the outposts.

Of Red-Hand little, if anything, was known regarding his real name, whence he came, or why he, a man of superior education and ability, had banished himself from the marts of civilization, and become an Indian-fighter and hunter upon the western border.

Five years before his first solitary pilgrimage into the Black Hills he had appeared upon the frontier, well armed and mounted, and possessed of considerable money, and his polite manner and ready generosity soon won for him many admirers, though no man among his companions could boast of being his intimate friend, or of any knowledge regarding him.

His blood-red right hand attracted attention, and yet but one man had dared to make jest regarding it, and he never repeated the offense, for he found the stranger not the one to trifle with.

At first the life on the plains seemed strange to Red-Hand, for by that name he now became known, and, as if to encourage it, or to hide his real name, he adorned his hat with the red coral band; but he quickly learned the crafty ways of the Indian, could soon strike a trail and follow it across the prairies, became a dead shot with rifle and revolver, and a desperate hand with the knife, and, before two years' stay on the border, was noted as a scout and hunter of superior ability, and a man of undaunted courage.

When the band of hardy pioneers, seeking to discover if the Indian legends of gold in the Black Hills were true, set out upon their expedition, Red-Hand, the Scout, was selected as the guide, for it was known that, years before, he had made a solitary pilgrimage into the country.

Of that lonely scout Red-Hand never spoke, but his comrades believed he had discovered more than he would divulge.

What that discovery was the reader already knows; and yet, unable to resist the temptation to once again visit the wild scenes of the Black Hills, the Scout had accepted the position of guide, and shortly after the score of daring plainsmen started for the unknown land, thoroughly mounted and equipped in every particular, for complete defense and offense.

After long days of travel the hill-country was reached, and remembering a number of advantageous localities for a safe camp, Red-Hand conducted the party to one of the most favorable positions, and, after a short rest set out alone to visit the gorge, several leagues above the encampment, where he left his companions, for an irresistible attraction lured him once more into the gorge, where was hidden the grave of Boyd Bernard.

CHAPTER V.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

FOR a long time did Red-Hand stand in silent bitterness at the grave of Boyd Bernard, his eyes cast down, and his two hands resting upon the muzzle of his rifle.

Across his stern face ever and anon swept a shadow of mingled sorrow and pain, as some haunting memory was recalled from the long-buried past.

At length, with a deep-drawn sigh, wrung from his inmost heart, the Scout slung his rifle

*The Evans Rifle is manufactured near Lewiston, Maine; contains thirty-five shots, and is one of the most complete and easily-handled guns ever made. It was invented in '70," I think.—BUFFALO BILL.

across his shoulder and strode away, his eyes carefully scanning the ground, for around the grove were traces that showed other feet than his had lately been there.

Steadily following the trail, it led him, after a tramp of a mile, into a narrow gulch, where his ears were suddenly startled by the unexpected and ringing report of a rifle, followed by a series of wild yells, which he well knew to be the war-cry of the wild Sioux of the northern tribes.

Again a single shot followed, and feeling confident that some one of his comrades had left camp and met with a band of Indians, the Scout ran hastily forward, and turning a bend in the gulch beheld a sight that for the moment deprived him of action, so great was his surprise.

Upon a ledge of rock, and partially protected by a huge bowlder, stood a young girl, scarcely more than sixteen years of age.

Her form was slightly above the medium height prescribed for beautiful women, and compact and graceful, while every motion indicated strength and agility.

A suit of buck-skin, with dressed skirt, and leggings elaborately embroidered, set off her figure, and a soft hat surmounted her head, and half-hid braids of golden hair that were in lovely contrast to her large, black eyes and dark lashes and eyebrows.

The face was browned almost to the hue of an Indian's, and yet the pure blood of the white shone in every feature of her beautiful and daring face, for though in deadly danger, the fair maiden stood her ground with fearless determination, her small rifle, evidently just discharged, clubbed in both hands to beat back three painted Sioux warriors who were rapidly bounding up the steep hillside to the ledge where she stood.

Two more Indians lay further down the slope, one motionless in death, the other writhing in agony, for a stream of blood poured from a wound in his side.

That the maiden had been surprised by the Indians and had sought the ledge for safety, was evident, and that her rifle had dropped two of her enemies was also evident, while her powder-flask and shot-pouch, attached to her belt, and lying half-way up the slope, proved that she had dropped her means of further defense.

This fact the three remaining warriors also discovered, and with wild yells they bounded on up the steep ascent, while their pale, but daring girl-foe stood her ground with clubbed rifle to meet them.

Such was the sight that greeted the eyes of Red-Hand, and his surprise for a moment kept him motionless.

But, another bound of the leading warrior carried him almost within reach of the clubbed rifle, and the uplifted tomahawk proved that the maiden must die unless the Scout acted quickly.

And Red-Hand did act quickly; his rifle-butt touched his shoulder, his red forefinger tripped the trigger, and the splendid weapon hurled forth its deadly pill; the Sioux sunk dead at the feet of the maiden he would have slain.

Ere the two startled comrades of the fallen brave could fly, there followed two more quick reports from the Scout's rifle, and the two sunk dead in their tracks, while in utter surprise, and with astonishment upon every feature of her lovely face, the rescued maiden rapidly descended the slope, picking up her belt as she came, and stood before Red-Hand, her manner that of commingled timidity and fearlessness, while in a voice strangely melodious, she said:

"I knew not that the pale-face hunters dare come into this unknown land of the Indian."

"And yet I find here a young girl, and one who it seems can take care of herself," and Red-Hand pointed to the dead and wounded Sioux that had fallen by the maiden's rifle.

"Ah, no, I would not now be alive had it not been for your true aim, sir; and from my heart I thank you," and the maiden grasped the hand of the Scout, to the next instant drop it with a half-cry of terror, as her eyes fell upon the red stain.

At her sudden action, Red-Hand's face flushed and then turned deadly pale; but controlling any emotion he might feel, he replied:

"I am glad my footsteps led me here to serve you; but can I ask if you live in these hills?"

"My home is far away from here, sir. Are you alone?" and the maiden asked the last question almost in a whisper.

"No one is near us now; but I have comrades down the gorge encamped."

The face of the maiden wore a startled expression, and she seemed hesitating in her own mind as to the best course to pursue, and in silence the Scout gazed upon her.

At length she spoke, and her voice was firm.

"I am thankful to you for my life, sir, and there is one other that will bless you for it; but it couldn't be that you should meet—no, no, and I must away."

"Hold, I beg you; you live here in this wild wilderness, you a mere child, and yet one whose language and address are not of the border, and yet you would leave me without one word of explanation?" said Red-Hand, with surprise.

"Yes, sir, though gladly would I have you seek the shelter of my home after what you have done for me; but it must not be, for there is one other whom I must consult. One day perhaps we may meet again; now, we must part, and I beg you, as a true man, not to strike my trail and follow me."

"You furthermore increase my interest in you, fair girl; but it shall be as you wish, though things I knew not of are transpiring in this land, where I believed the feet of few pale-faces had ever trod."

"Yes, sir; now and then a white hunter has wandered into these wilds, and down the gorge a mile, is the grave of one who lost his life here, years ago."

Red-Hand started, and glancing searchingly into the maiden's face, while a strange expression flitted across his own, asked:

"How long have you known of that grave in the valley?"

"I first saw it three years ago—I was hunting in the valley, wounded a deer, and he fell near the tree; did you ever see the grave?"

"Yes, I passed it half an hour ago; you will not let me see your home, then?"

"No; your life might be the forfeit, and I would not have harm befall you. Farewell."

Without another word the maiden threw her rifle across her arm, gave a quick, earnest glance into the face of the Scout, and walked rapidly up the gulch to soon disappear behind a large bowlder, while Red-Hand silently and in wonder gazed after her retreating form.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

So mystified was the Scout at all he had seen and heard that he was at first tempted to break his word and follow on after the maiden, that he might solve the puzzle of her being there in the midst of the Black Hills, and, by her own words, no stranger in that wild region.

Had her language and appearance been different, had she been some bold, rude girl of the frontier, he might have believed her the daughter of some reckless borderman, who, tiring of the society of his fellow-men, had sought a home in that far-away country; or, mayhap, the waif of an Indian camp, stolen from some settlement during a red-skin raid, and raised in the wigwam of a chief.

But her looks, her language, all belied these suppositions, and as to who or what she was the Scout remained in the dark.

"Well, I'll never solve the mystery standing here; I'll back to camp, and perhaps, as she said, we may meet again."

So saying, Red-Hand slung his rifle across his arm, and stepped forward to tear the scalp-locks of the Sioux from their heads, when there came the sharp crack of a rifle, the whir of a bullet, and the Scout staggered backward and fell, a crimson stream bursting from his left temple.

As Red-Hand fell to the ground a tall form suddenly came down the steep hillside, his rifle, still smoking, held in his hand.

It was no Indian that had thus turned his rifle upon the Scout, to avenge his slain comrades, but a man of his own race, though the upper part of his face was darkly bronzed, almost to the hue of the red-skin, and the lower part of his face was concealed beneath an iron-gray beard, that fell in masses below his waist.

His eyes were dark, fiery, constantly restless, and his hair white and worn long, though age could have scarcely thus frosted hair and beard, and left the form strong and upright.

Over six feet in height, straight as an arrow, with broad shoulders and massive breast, and clad in a suit of buck-skin, he was a majestic specimen of manhood, a manhood marred by a certain inquietude of manner, nervous restlessness of the eyes, and a look of cruelty and avariciousness upon his face.

Besides his rifle, one of the Spencer pattern, he carried in his belt a revolver, knife and large hatchet, and as he came down the hill at a long, swinging pace, seemed a dangerous foe to meet.

Upon his face rested an exultant smile, as if rejoicing in his work, in the misery of a human being, and he advanced toward the Scout with a look it was hard to read.

But the bullet sent in search of life had missed its aim, and only momentarily stunned the Scout, who suddenly sprang to his feet, and with drawn knife rushed upon his would-be slayer.

Unexpected, as was the movement, the stranger sprang back quickly, and drawing his knife, met the blade of his assailant in mid-air, and with a loud clash, the weapons rung together.

Then each man stood at bay, their eyes glaring into each other's, their breath hard drawn, and their muscles nerved to iron firmness.

Both were tall and of powerful build, and whatever their sins might be, they were as brave as the desert lion, and the struggle between them must be one of life and death, for neither would yield one inch to the other.

As for Red-Hand, he had not sought the combat; a man who should have been his friend had ruthlessly attempted to shoot him down, and if, in return, he could avenge himself upon him, he intended to do so, though why the other sought his life he knew not.

For an instant thus stood the two men, their knives held firmly together, and then the glitter of Red-Hand's eyes proved that he meditated action.

But ere he could make the slightest motion there came a loud cry of alarm, and the next moment a graceful form bounded in between the two men.

It was the maiden who a short while before had parted with the Scout.

As she bounded in between the two men her uplifted hands seized a wrist of each, and her voice fairly rung as she cried out:

"Hold! This must not be!"

"Back, Pearl, back! I will have his life, for you know my vow!" cried the stranger.

"No, father; lower your knife, for not half an hour ago this man saved my life—see!" and the maiden addressed as Pearl pointed to the dead bodies of her Indian enemies.

"Ha! you were in danger, Pearl, and he saved you?" and the man spoke in earnest tones, and turned his gaze again upon Red-Hand, who had stepped back at the approach of the maiden, yet still held his knife ready for defense.

"Yes, father; this brave Scout rescued me when yonder Sioux would have taken my life."

"True, I aided the maiden after she had already sent two of the red devils to their happy hunting-grounds; but if you have aught against me, comrade, let not that act of mine stand in the way, for twice have you attempted my life now," and Red-Hand spoke in a reckless, determined tone, peculiar to him when much moved.

Again the stranger turned his gaze upon the Scout, and something he saw there seemed to trouble him deeply, for he passed his hand across his face, muttering as if communing with the past.

"Yes, it is his face—no, it cannot be—ha! the red hand!—it is he," and the man staggered back a step or two, while the maiden sprang to his side, crying:

"Father, are you ill?"

"No, child, I felt faint for a moment, when I thought how near I came to slaying one who had saved your life. Partner, do you journey often into these hills?"

Red-Hand saw that the old man had given an evasive reply, but replied quietly:

"This is my second coming into the Black Hills. I deemed this country far beyond the line where white men dwelt, and yet I find you a dweller here."

"Comrade, I have sickened of life among my fellow-men, and came here to shun mankind; but enough! take the warning of one who long not warn in vain, and this very night turn your back upon these hills, for only dangers can surround you here; go, go at once!"

"Comrade, I love dangers, and if you can live here I can also. I bid you a pleasant good-night."

So saying, Red-Hand wheeled on his heel, touched his hat politely to the maiden and strode away, to soon disappear around a bend in the gulch.

CHAPTER VII.

LONE DICK.

MORE and more mystified by everything he discovered in the Black Hills, Red-Hand walked rapidly away in the direction of his camp, and after nightfall arrived, to find another surprise awaiting him, for an old trapper had come in, and told his story of how he had been hunting on the streams, and had struck the trail of the party coming to the Hills.

Feeling assured that there was something up beyond his comprehension, he determined to strike the trail and follow it up, to see what could carry a party into the Black Hills.

The second night after starting upon the trail he camped in a piece of timber bordering the bank of a small stream, and was soon fast asleep, to be awakened an hour after by the arrival of a train of emigrants, who were also moving for the Black Hills.

From his retreat he observed that the train consisted of some thirty pack-mules, instead of wagons, and about twenty men, all splendidly armed, while there were as many women and children accompanying them.

Not wishing to make himself known, for he believed from all he saw that the expedition was a secret one, the old trapper lay quiet all night, and at early dawn the party arose and continued on their journey directly toward the Black Hills, and following the trail of the party that had gone before.

"Did you see the party again after that night, Lone Dick?" asked Red-Hand of the old hunter, whom he had met in the settlements now and then, and knew as a brave man who always tramped alone, and never meddled with the affairs of other people.

"No, I skarted round them and struck your trail ag'in, and then come on, and here I is," replied Lone Dick, who was a real frontiersman in appearance and dress.

"And why did you follow us, Lone Dick?"

"I'll tole you. Yer see, Red-Hand, I has hearn how there was yellow metal up in these diggin's, and when I see'd yer trail I knowed as how somethin' was up, and I determined to nose it out, kase I's been workin' at traps nigh onto twenty year, and I ain't got no fortin' yet, and I felt as how ef yer was a good set of fellers you wouldn't mind havin' another true rifle and arm with your'n, for this is an all-fired dirty Injin country, you know."

"Yes, and I have no objection to the aid of your good arm, Lone Dick, and will tell you frankly we did come here to prospect for gold, and kept it dark because the government would send troops after us. But, Lone Dick, I do not understand about the train you speak of, and think it strange that settlers should come into these hills, bringing their wives and children with them."

"It's all-fired strange, Scout; but we kin soon nose out what they're doin' here, and whar they're goin' to squat."

"True, and you and I will start on a scout in the morning, and follow up their trail, while the boys are busy putting up a log fort, for the Sioux are not going to let us have peaceful possession here, and will soon discover that five of their warriors were scalped to-day," said Red-Hand.

"What! Blazes! did yer riz the h'ar of five to-day?" asked Lone Dick, and the remainder of the party gazed upon Red-Hand in surprise, while he quietly replied:

"I had a little skirmish to-day; not of my own seeking, however," and tossing the bundle of Sioux scalps to Lone Dick, he rolled himself in his blanket and soon appeared to be fast asleep, leaving his comrades surprised at his unwillingness to make known the particulars of his adventure with the Indians, and feeling confident that, as blood had already been shed, it was their duty to make every preparation against surprise and attack.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OLD FRIEND AND NEW FACES.

AT the first glimmer of dawn in the east Red-Hand was on his feet, and calling to Lone Dick, the two soon set out upon their way to strike the trail of the emigrants.

Going in a southerly direction, and riding rapidly, for both were well mounted, shortly after noon the scout discovered fresh traces that proved the train had lately passed along. Following up, they were not long in finding out that a considerable number of recent tracks showed that the newly-arrived party were already dogged by Indians, who were determined to resist this invasion into their territory.

As the sun went down beyond the western

hills, there came to the ears of the two men the sound of firing, and dashing on at full speed, they soon came upon a spirited scene.

In the mouth of a small canyon were gathered several persons, huddled together, and with their rifles endeavoring to keep back some two-score Sioux braves, who were pressing them hard.

Several Indians lay dead here and there, and, infuriated by the loss of their comrades, the band of warriors were preparing to rush in force upon the small party in the canyon and end the combat by a hand-to-hand conflict.

At this moment Red-Hand and Lone Dick came in sight, and a glance showed them that the small party were whites, and with yells infernal they dashed upon the Indians, firing their repeating rifles as they rode.

With never-failing aim, the rifle of Red-Hand sent many a warrior and horse to the ground, and its rapid, rattling fire, added to that of Lone Dick, caused the red-skins to believe a large reinforcement had arrived to aid the pale-faces, and they broke for cover, while from the canyon dashed three men, firing as they came, and greatly adding to the fright of the Indians, who hastily retreated into a gorge in the hills, leaving their dead upon the field.

"Hip, hip hoopla! Red-Hand, as I live! Old fellow, I owe you one," and one of the besieged party dashed up to the Scout, and warmly grasped his hand.

That the man who so warmly welcomed Red-Hand was a frontiersman was evident by his attire and general appearance, for he was clad in buck-skin, moccasins and all, and wore a slouch hat ornamented with a gold-sun looping up the rim in front, and adding to the bold and determined expression upon his fine face.

His form was graceful, wiry, and denoted great strength, while his movements were quick, nervous, and his dark eyes were restless.

His features were French—in fact, he was a Frenchman, coming, it was said, from Michigan, where his father lived—a noble, exiled from his native land.

Thoroughly armed and equipped, and mounted upon a large, sinewy horse, Tom Sun—for such was his name—was a dangerous foe.

In his frank, pleasant way he greeted Red-Hand and Lone Dick, and then turning to his comrades, said:

"Here, Red-Hand, are friends I am guiding up into the Hills to hunt a home."

"Captain Ramsey, this is Red-Hand, the Scout—what his other name is, God and himself only know; but that is no matter, for a man out here does not run so much by the handle of his name as he does by his actions, and I'll vouch for it there is no man on the border who is the superior of my friend, here."

"I am glad to meet you, sir, and your name is not unknown to me. This is my son, sir, and this my daughter," and the man addressed as Captain Ramsey turned to a young man who rode by his side, and a fair young girl, who had reined her horse slightly back.

Red-Hand glanced first into the face of Captain Ramsey, and beheld a man of fifty years of age, with a noble face and stalwart form; but though he appeared like a borderman, his manner indicated that his earlier life had been passed amid far different scenes.

His son, Burton Ramsey, was about twenty years of age, and possessed a good-looking face and handsome form, clad like his father in a suit of gray home-spun.

Ruth Ramsey, the daughter, seemed like a ray of sunshine in that group of stern men, and upon her lovely face and fairy form the Scout allowed his eyes to linger a moment in earnest admiration, ere he turned to Tom Sun, and said:

"Tom, what brings you into this wild land?"

"My horse, of course; but, joking aside, comrade, the captain here was in the army some years ago, and resigning his commission, settled down upon the border of the South-west on a ranch; but he concluded he would do better up in these Hills, and so his whole neighborhood up stakes, and here they are, I being the guide of the expedition."

"There is no more beautiful country to settle in, if Government and the Indians will only let you alone," remarked Red-Hand.

"Yes, and no richer country in minerals, I am convinced, Scout, and I believe we can get

* Tom Sun is one of the finest scouts on the plains to-day; a splendid specimen of manhood, generous to a fault, and brave as a lion; he is admired by all who know him.—BUFFALO BILL.

a hold here and soon get Government to support us."

"I doubt the support of Government, captain, and it is a dangerous country into which to bring women and children."

"True, Scout; but we will have to teach the Indians to let us alone or pacify them with presents."

"That Quaker idea of dealing with red-skins is losing ground, captain, and if the Indians know they can get all the presents by one grand fight, and a number of scalps to boot, why, it is their nature to do so."

"You paint a bad picture, Scout; but, can I ask, how is it I find you here in these Hills, and with only one comrade?"

"A single man can go, sir, where a dozen dare not attempt it. I am here with a band of brave fellows who came for the same purpose—that doubtless brought you—to search for gold."

"By Heaven you are right, Scout! I have reason to know that there are large quantities of gold here," replied Captain Ramsey, with enthusiasm.

"There is certainly gold here, sir, and silver, too, for that matter; but all gold-seekers in the Black Hills come here at the risk of their lives until Government sends troops to protect the miners; and that it cannot do until the country is purchased from the Indians, who have a claim upon it for a number of years to come."

"You speak knowingly, Scout, and I feel that you are right; but here we are, and here we intend to remain as long as it is in our power to do so."

"Still it was wrong to bring women and children with you. A man has a right to play with his own life, but not those of his wife and children, and already you have had a sample of how the red-skins intend to receive you," and Red-Hand spoke warmly.

"True; and had it not been for your brave dash to our relief, ere now our end might have come; but let us on after the train, and we can give you some good cheer after we go into camp, and I beg of you not to paint a dark side to our expedition, for there may be a few faint hearts among us."

"I have said all I intend to, captain. Have you determined upon where you intend to camp?"

"No, for we are in the dark regarding locations."

"Then I would advise that you bend more to the north-east, and you will find a fertile valley and good streams, and be also within a third of a day's journey from our camp, and you know there is safety in numbers."

"I have advised building a stronghold at once, and then, should the Indians prove troublesome, we have at least protection," said Tom Sun.

"You are right, Tom! you can reach the spot I speak of early to-morrow, and circumstances warrant that you make no delay in building your fort. How many men have you with you?"

"We have about thirty, Red-Hand, and about as many non-combatants, and we are well armed and equipped, I assure you."

"In our band there are a score of miners, and no women or children. If it comes to the worst, why, our united bands should make a good fight. But come, we had better go on, for I see Lone Dick has scalped the Indians."

"Yes, he'd rather scalp a Sioux than say his prayers," laughed Tom Sun, and the party rode rapidly after the train, several miles ahead, and which Captain Ramsey had imprudently allowed to proceed, while he stopped to examine some traces of gold, accompanied only by his guide, son and daughter; but the ex-officer was most enthusiastic over the Black Hills, had a bad case of "gold-fever," and was willing to risk life and all in the search for the precious yellow god, which numbered so many ardent worshippers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO STRONGHOLDS.

SOMEWHAT alarmed, in spite of himself, by the words of Red-Hand, Captain Ramsey began to feel that he had allowed his enthusiasm to go perhaps too far in leading an expedition into the Black Hills, when the lives of the whole party might be the forfeit for their fool-hardiness.

But having at length entered the Promised Land, it was not in the nature of the old soldier to turn back, and he contented himself with a determination to so fortify his camp as to make it impregnable to the attacks of the red-skins; and his energetic example, as soon as the train reached the designated spot for

encampment, soon set all the men at work at the log fort.

Having conducted the train to its advantageous site, both for gold-hunting and defense from the Indians, Red-Hand left for his own camp, accompanied by Lone Dick and Tom Sun, the latter going with his brother scout to learn the locality of the miners' camp.

As the three men rode along they conversed over the future prospects of the country which they had so boldly invaded, and did not doubt but that their example would be followed by others as soon as it became known that white men were living in the Black Hills, which had always before been considered the rightful land of the red-skin.

Without exciting suspicion as to his motives, Red-Hand questioned his companions closely regarding their ever having heard of the existence of any whites in the Black Hills, and learned that there were vague rumors upon the border among the plainsmen that one of the Sioux tribe had a white chief—an old man who lived hermit-like away from his own race.

But more than this neither Tom Sun nor Lone Dick could tell, and many believed it was mere rumor, as no hunter or trapper had ever seen the individual spoken of, or even seen an Indian who had done so.

Convinced that it was not all idle rumor, after what he knew, Red-Hand said nothing to his companions, however, but determined to hunt out himself this hermit of the Black Hills, and discover the mystery that had caused him to bury himself and his beautiful daughter thus far away from his race, and live among a savage people.

Arriving at his own camp, Red-Hand found that his comrades had made rapid progress with their work, and that the walls of the stockade fort were already assuming shape.

The situation selected by the Scout was certainly a most advantageous position, being under the shelter of a huge hill of rock, inaccessible to the foot of man, and fronting on the bank of a mountain stream.

The stockade fence encircled a portion of rich, grassy land where the horses could luxuriate and where a garden plot for vegetables was laid out.

The only approaches to the spot were across the stream, and around the base of the cliff by a narrow pathway that half a dozen men could defend against a hundred, and the miners were delighted at the natural defense of their stronghold, while Tom Sun returned to his own encampment determined to take pattern after the example of Red-Hand and prepare for trouble ahead.

Thus several weeks passed away and the two settlements in the Black Hills were prepared against every emergency, and at length the miners began to turn their attention toward gold-seeking, the real object that had caused them to risk life in journeying thus far beyond the confines of civilization.

As for Red-Hand and Tom Sun, they cared little for gold, and were thorough plainsmen, spending their time in scouting and hunting for their respective camps, while Lone Dick had caught the fever of avariciousness and was preparing to dig his way to fortune, if he had to go clear through to China.

Separated only by a score of miles from each other, the different members of the gold-seekers' camps became most friendly, and many were the young miners who loved to ride over to the Ramsey stronghold and sun themselves in the bright glances of Ruth Ramsey's eyes, for, of the half-dozen fair maidens in her party she was decidedly the belle.

But Ruth seemed to care little for their admiration, for her prettiest glances were turned on Red-Hand, for, from her first meeting with him, when he rescued her from the band of Sioux braves, she had held a warm place for him in her heart, and felt that the Scout's dark, handsome face must ever be engraven on her memory, and the strange mystery that hung around his life interested her still more to him.

Thus the days and weeks glided by, and still, excepting a skirmish now and then, the Indians had not disturbed the two camps, and daily the miners worked away for gold, while Tom Sun and Red-Hand scouted and hunted through the hills and valleys, and in one of their scouting trips made a discovery which was not at all agreeable to the invaders of the new Eldorado.

CHAPTER X.

THE CABIN IN THE HILLS.

WHEN Red-Hand had walked away from the

maiden and her father, there was a silence of several minutes; then the old man said:

"Pearl, you must not wander thus far from the retreat, in future, for my scouts bring me news of an invasion into our territory."

"Are soldiers coming into the Hills, father?"

"Soldiers or citizens, they are all the same to me, and I am determined to make these Hills too hot to hold them, by heaven! The man who has just left us doubtless belongs to one of these invading bands."

"Father, why is it you so hate your race? Tell me, I pray you, why you thus hide away from our own people?"

"Pearl, never dare to question my actions again," almost shrieked the old man, and then he continued:

"You have food in plenty, clothes to wear, and what more do you want?"

"Here no one molests us, and in the settlements and cities life is a continual struggle and all men are evil—ay, against all men I have a hate that will go with me to the grave."

"Girl, you know my vow, and I repeat it, that I will kill, or cause to be killed, every pale-face that comes into these Hills."

"What! is there no spot where I can find seclusion from my hated race?"

Pearl gazed upon the excited face of her father with a feeling of awe, and, accustomed to be wholly governed by him, she made no reply. The old man walked up to the bodies of the dead Indians and examined them attentively, after which he said:

"Pearl, these red-skins belong to the band of the young chief White Slayer—can he have ordered this attack on you?"

"I do not know, sir: but I do know they rushed upon me to make me prisoner, and I fled to yonder ledge for safety, and shot two of their number. Had not the brave man who has just left us come to my rescue I would have been slain."

"Strange, very strange. Did you have any words with White Slayer when he was last at the retreat?"

"I told him I would never become his wife."

"Ha! then he it was who ordered this attack upon you. Come, girl, we must be off."

Leading the way the old man started off up the gorge, followed by the maiden, whose lovely face had become strangely moody.

After traversing a distance of several miles the man led the way up the steep hillside, and for half an hour the two climbed up the mountain, until they came to a ledge, or shelf, half an acre in size, and above which the mountain towered to a vast height.

From this ledge a grand and extensive view was had for miles and miles of country, and far below lay valleys traversed by running streams, and deep rocky canyons where it seemed hardly possible for man to go.

Against the base of the cliff, and fronting the magnificent view, was built a log cabin, constructed for both defense and comfort, for it was large and compactly put together, and the two windows commanded the only visible approach to the ledge, the one by which the old man and maiden had come.

The cabin had one door in front, and this was open, for in it sat an old Indian woman, pounding coffee in a stone jar.

Within, the cabin was divided into two rooms, the first containing a rude table in the center, a cupboard with dishes and pans, a rack filled with books, another upon which hung, ready for use, rifles, shot-guns, pistols and knives of various descriptions, and in the corner was a cot of bear and beaver-skins.

A small door opened into the second room, which was at once noticeable for its air of neatness and comfort, for the bed was tempting in its cleanliness, and around the chamber was every indication that the fair Pearl was an ingenious and tidy housekeeper.

A curtain, hung against the back of the cabin wall, was raised, and this act discovered the opening of a large cave which extended far back into the interior of the mountain.

Entering the cabin Pearl at once laid aside her rifle and accouterments, and set about aiding the Indian woman to prepare supper, while her father continued on through the rooms into the cave beyond.

As if familiar with the dark cavern, he walked on with quick step for some hundred yards, the cave gradually descending, until he came out into a small valley on the other side of the hill.

A well-worn path led across the small vale, and following this the old man skirted the base of the hill, and after a further walk of a mile suddenly came upon a most picturesque scene,

yet one which seemed to have no attraction for him in his then moody manner.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE AND RED CHIEFS.

THE scene that met the view of the strange old man was a lovely valley spread out at his feet, for he was following a pathway that encircled, like a belt, a high hill.

Through the valley ran a winding stream, upon both banks of which were scores of Indian wigwams, through the open peaks of which the blue smoke curled lazily upward to mingle with the clouds above.

Far above, the hilltops were painted in golden colors from the setting sun, but below, the valley was cast in shadow and night was coming on apace to leave the world in darkness until another morn.

In the background of the scene, and close to the base of the hills upon either side of the valley, were hundreds of horses and cattle, grazing upon the rich grass that sprung up in wild luxuriance beneath their feet.

Here and there were visible squaws hurrying to and fro with arms full of wood brought from the forest, and lying in idleness upon the banks of the stream were lazy warriors looking upon their wives preparing the evening meal and doing all the work.

Groups of children skurried hither and thither in glee, and older ones, those youths who were aspiring to be mighty braves when their sun of manhood should rise, were swimming in the waters of the river, or practicing at targets with their bows and arrows.

It was a strange and picturesque scene, one only met with upon the frontier of our own land, and yet the old man seemed to care nothing for it—as he hurried down the steep hillside.

As he entered the camp, considerable respect was shown him by the Indians he met, and yet he noticed none of them, as he bent his way toward a large lodge near the center of the encampment.

In front of this wigwam lay an Indian, reclining at length upon a bear-skin, and as the white man approached, he arose and greeted him.

He was a warrior of striking and noble appearance, one of the Cooper novel stripe of Indian braves, for his form was literally perfect, and his face almost handsome.

His attire was also far better than that usually seen among red-men, his leggings being handsomely bordered, as was also a hunting-shirt of the finest dressed deer-skin.

A coronet of gorgeously dyed feathers surmounted his head, and in his belt was stuck an ivory-handled bowie-knife, a tomahawk, ingeniously carved, and a revolver, while by his side lay a silver-mounted rifle.

"The White Slayer is glad to see the Gray Chief; will he enter the wig-wam of his red brother?" and the young warrior spoke with a dignity and politeness that seemed natural to him.

"No, the White Slayer is false to me. Why did he attempt to carry the Pearl of my heart from her cabin-home?" angrily replied the white man, whom the Indians called the Gray Chief.

A flush stole into the red face of the young chief at the charge, and for a moment he was silent, but then said, earnestly:

"The heart of the White Slayer is not here in his bosom, but with the pale-face maiden on the hill. She is the dewdrop that refreshes his life, and yet she turns her eyes from the White Slayer, though he is the chief of his tribe."

"All true, chief; but, did you expect to win the girl by force?"

"Could the White Slayer use his arm toward the Pearl of the Hills?" indignantly said the Indian.

"And yet you sent five of your braves to take the Pearl captive."

"Would the Gray Chief trifle with White Slayer, or does he speak with a false tongue?" said the chief, and glancing into the Indian's face, the old man read there only truth, and felt that he had not ordered the violence done Pearl.

Then in a few words he told the young chief all that had occurred, and with a surprised frown the White Slayer heard him through.

Then he said:

"The young men who thus acted toward the Pearl of the Hills were squaw braves, and they deserved their fate."

"White Slayer knows who has done this wrong to the Pearl, and he shall make his knife drink his blood for it; but, Gray Chief, the pale-

faces must not come into our land—no, they must be swept back upon the prairies."

"Ha! that is my humor, White Slayer, and I am glad to see you are of the same mind."

"Now listen to me: scouts have brought news that there are two bands of pale-faces marching into our Hills, and I wish you to assemble your warriors and prepare them for the war-path."

"Do not act in haste, for those men come here to remain, take my word for it; and we can bide our time, and so lay our plans that not one pale-face shall ever tread the prairie sward again."

"The Gray Chief hates his people," quietly said the chief.

"Hate! I abhor, I curse them; and, White Slayer, when the scalp of the last man of these bands hangs upon yonder war-pole, I promise you that the Pearl of the Hills shall gladden your wigwam with her presence."

The eyes of White Slayer glittered with joy, but he said quietly:

"It shall be as the Gray Chief says: in one moon there shall be five hundred warriors upon the war-path of the pale-faces. White Slayer has said it."

"Ay, chief, and let me tell you, that a great foe to your people is in yonder valley—a man before whom your stoutest warriors tremble, for I saw him."

"The Sioux warriors never fly from a foe; they know no fear," proudly returned the chief.

"And yet I have seen Sioux braves, who, when a score in number, dared not face that man."

"It was he who slew the five warriors in the gorge to-day," and Gray Chief determined not to let White Slayer know that Pearl had sent two of his young men to the happy-hunting grounds.

"Who is this great brave?" asked the chief, with considerable interest.

"The Red-Hand Scout."

In spite of himself the young chief flinched at the name, and his eagle eye glanced quickly around the surrounding hills, rapidly darkening before the approach of night.

"The Red-Hand is a great brave: but his scalp will yet be taken," replied White Slayer, with the braggadocio spirit natural to the red-skin.

"See that it is. Now I will back to my home in the Hills, for I like not your lowlands, chief," and so saying, the old man walked rapidly back the way he had come, his thoughts too busy to bestow more than a passing glance down upon the Indian village, now hidden in gloom, excepting here and there where a camp-fire glimmered in front of some wigwam, whose lord had been late in returning to the bosom of his red family, and where the patient squaw was busy in preparing him his supper.

After a rapid walk Gray Chief reached his cabin, and found an humble, but substantial repast awaiting him, after partaking of which he lighted his brier-wood pipe, and repaired to the ledge to smoke and think over the murder-plan he had laid for the destruction of those of his own race.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY.

THE discovery, made by the two scouts, and which betokened no good to the band of pale-face invaders into the Black Hills, was one that certainly caused them considerable uneasiness regarding the women and children of Captain Ramsey's party.

Returning from a hunt one morning, some three weeks after the coming to the Black Hills, Tom Sun beheld the form of a man bounding along the ridge of a high range of hills.

A closer inspection proved that it was Red-Hand, and that he was in rapid chase of some object was evident.

At first Tom Sun believed it was a deer he was anxious to get a shot at, when he suddenly beheld the scout drop on one knee and rapidly his rifle was raised to his shoulder, while once, twice, thrice the flame burst from the muzzle, and the ringing reports echoed down the glen.

"Red-Hand never shoots three times at a deer—no, there goes another shot; and, another—he's on an Injun's trail," said Tom Sun, and quickly he bounded up the steep hill to the relief of his friend.

Ere he reached the spot, Red-Hand suddenly darted back along the ridge, and discovering Tom Sun, shouted to him in ringing tones:

"Come, Tom, for your life, come!"

Urged by the earnest manner of his brother-scout, Tom Sun dashed rapidly along the hill, and the two friends were soon together.

"Injuns!" simply said Tom Sun, in an inquiring tone.

"Worse than that," replied Red-Hand, as the two ran rapidly along the ridge, side by side.

"The devil!"

"No, not the devil himself, but a band of his imps."

"You've got me, Red-Hand—not Injuns, or the devil, but some of his imps; they must be wicked fellows to cause you to make such time," and Tom Sun glanced over his shoulder as the two ran along.

"I refer to Kansas King's outlaws," suddenly said Red-Hand, as the two reached the valley and wheeled into a deep canyon in the hills.

Tom Sun stopped short, and turned his full gaze upon his companion, while he said, earnestly.

"Do you mean it? Has Kansas King and his outlaws come into these Hills?"

"I tell you the truth, as you will see, if they pursue me, as doubtless they will, for I left them some of their comrades to avenge."

"Doubtless! it is a way you have," dryly returned Tom Sun, and then he continued:

"Tell us about it; how did you first discover it?"

"I was returning to camp, and from the ridge above discovered a line of horsemen filing along the valley, and at once ran, to get a view of them, to the end of the hill."

"I saw you making tracks, and thought you were after a deer."

"No, I was after different game."

"When I reached the hill-top I saw the head of the column, and soon over forty of the band came in sight, riding Indian file, and between two of them was none other than Lone Dick, the old trapper."

"Bagged him, have they?"

"Yes, but I think he got away, for I sent a few shots into their midst which certainly did them no good, and I saw Lone Dick make a break down the gulch; if he didn't get away, it was not his fault."

"Then you put back down the ridge?"

"Yes, I saw a dozen start toward the hill, and I thought it best to fall back rapidly."

"You did it, too; but the devils will not come down here, so we had better wait awhile and then scout round and see what is to be done."

"We will go to the glen, now, and see if they have left. I do not wish them to see me, or you, and perhaps we can circumvent any of their plans; but what can have brought Kansas King into these Hills?"

"He's had some hot brushes lately with the troops, you know, and he may have come up here to rest his men and horses, and at the same time look for a nest-egg in the shape of plunder from our bands; he certainly did not come here to fight Sioux."

"Not he; no, he has other game. Come."

So saying, Red-Hand peered cautiously out from the canyon, and then led the way once more along the ridge of the hill, in the direction of the spot where he had knelt and fired upon the outlaw column.

Arriving at the place, all seemed quiet in the glen—yes, the quietude of death rested there, for several human forms lay, face downward, upon the sward, lying where they had fallen when tumbled from their saddles by the unerring aim of Red-Hand.

"By Heaven, Tom, I verily believe they skedaddled after my fire, and were as anxious to get out of the way as I was."

"You bet they were not pining to remain; but, with Kansas King at their head, his men seldom make tracks."

"No, but he was not at their head—at least I did not see him, though I recognized his lieutenant."

"Bad Burke?"

"Yes."

"May the devil fly away with that imp! he is worse than Kansas King, for he has not a single redeeming trait, and when a fellow is as bad as that, I think he is deserted by God, man, and the devil."

"You are right, Tom; Bad Burke is a vile creature, and I wish I had him in length of my rifle; but, come—let us go down into the glen."

"It's risky business, for we have no cover, and might be called to pass in our cheeks by some fellow hidden behind a rock."

"True, Tom; but my creed is that one time to die is just as good as another, though of course it behooves us to protect our lives all in our power; but come, we must down into the glen, and then we'll strike the trail of the outlaws and see where their lay-out is, and find out what brought them into these Hills."

So saying, Red-Hand moved over the hill-top, and Tom Sun instantly following, the two scouts descended into the valley, upon which rested the shadow of death.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "BOWLD SOGER BOY."

CAUTIOUSLY, and with restless, searching eyes, the two scouts descended the hill and soon reached the bottom of the glen, when they beheld a sight, which to one unaccustomed to a wild life on the border, amid scenes of carnage and death, would have been a sad spectacle.

Near the base of the hill lay a gallant gray steed, motionless in death, and still saddled and bridled, while a pool of blood was beneath his head.

Further on a few yards, writhing in the agony of a broken leg, was a bay mare, her earnest eyes turning imploringly upon the two scouts, as if begging them with mute glance to put her out of misery.

Up to this animal Red-Hand stepped; his knife was drawn from its sheath, and then the bright blade was driven into the heart of the noble beast, while with a sigh, the Scout said, feelingly:

"Poor thing! it is a pity to have you suffer for the sins of your master."

Not ten feet from the mare—who sunk back with an almost human groan when the Scout drove his knife to her heart—lay a man prone upon his face.

He was a burly fellow, attired in a suit half military, half citizen, and upon his feet were a pair of cavalry boots.

His head was wedged into his hat, which the Scout removed as he turned him upon his back, the act displaying a man of red hair and beard.

The face was that of a common mortal, cruel and brutal, and a ragged wound in his side proved the shot of Red-Hand from the hill had gone straight to the seat of life and torn it from its clayey throne.

Around a bend in the glen, and presenting the appearance of having been dragged there by his steed, was a wounded man, supporting himself against a rock, and gazing upon the approaching scouts with an expression that was irresistibly laughable in spite of the seriousness of the situation.

His clothes were bedraggled with dirt, his face scratched, and his short sandy hair stood on end, while one foot was bare of a boot, proving that he had been dragged by his stirrup until the boot had come off.

His attire was a strange mixture of the hunter's garb, Indian costume, and a soldier's and citizen's wardrobe combined, and the front of his jacket was stained with blood, while both hands were pressed upon his right side in the manner of some love-sick swain swearing entire heartfelt devotion to his lady-love.

A belt of leather encircled the aldermanic waist of this worthy, and upheld an old cavalry saber and a large horse-pistol.

"Well, sir, what have you to say for your self?" said Red-Hand, approaching, and repressing a smile at the strange appearance of the man.

In a voice that at once betrayed the nationality of the individual, he replied:

"Och, comrade, I'm kilt intirely, am I; bad luck to sogerin' in this blessed country."

"Soldiering! are you a soldier?"

"And faith, does yez take me for a dishonest man?"

"I take you for just what you are—an outlaw."

"Oh, mither of the holy Moses! an outlaw, is it, I am! St. Patrick and the twelve apostles be after presarving me ef I was one of those miserable murdering varmin'ts," and the son of Erin raised his hands in horror at the thought.

"Now, look here, Paddy—"

"Michael is my name, yer honor, Michael Mullaney—"

"Well, Paddy or Mikey, either one will look well on your tombstone. You must not lie to me; you are a member of Kansas King's band!"

"Oh, holy mither! yer honor is joking with me. Why, it's meself that is a bowld soger."

"Much soldier you are," put in Tom Sun, with a motion toward his neck with a knife, and Red-Hand continued:

"Now, look here, Paddy—"

"Michael, yer honor."

"Well, Michael, you belong to the outlaw band of Kansas King, and I know it, for I fired the shot that sent you from your horse; strange my aim was not truer."

"Truer! truer, is it! Howly Moses, but it's

"killin' me, it is," and the Irishman groaned as if in terrible pain.

"No, it has merely cut the flesh and will do you no harm," and Red-Hand examined the wound which had grazed a rib, and thus was the bullet turned from its search for life.

"Ochone! bad luck to you, Michael Mullaney, for not finding out yerself that yez wasn't kilt, and then paddlin' thim same legs of yours out of this," and Michael looked with anger upon himself.

"Well, you are a prisoner now, and I wish you to tell me the truth; are you not a member of Kansas King's band of outlaws?" and Red-Hand looked sternly into the face of the man before him, who still continued seated upon the ground, and pressing his hands tightly upon his wounded side.

Promptly the Irishman replied:

"I was afther being in company wid the robbers, yer honor, bad luck to thim; but yez see I was their prisoner."

"Their prisoner! You were not one of the band, then?"

"Holy mither forbid."

"What were you before they took you prisoner?"

"I was afther bein' a prisoner to the Injuns, yer honor."

"Where were you captured by the Indians, and how long ago?"

"Six months ago, yer honor, I was captered by Little Big Man."

"It is strange that chief did not kill you, Michael."

"Yis, yer honor."

"Now, mind you, I want the truth; where were you before the Indians took you?"

"In jail in North Platte, sir."

"Why were you in jail?"

"I had borrowed a horse, yer honor, and was afther forgittin' to return 'im."

"And before you stole the horse, Michael?"

"I was a bowld soger, sir, at the fort."

"Were you discharged, Michael?"

"I was afther discharging meself, sir."

"You deserted?"

"No, sur; I was afther going to slape on the roadside, and the rigimint wint on and deserted me."

"I understand; now before you were a soldier what was your occupation?"

"Diggin' praties, in ould Ireland, God bless her, sur."

"Well, Michael, it seems you have had a checkered career, which accounts for your variegated wardrobe of citizen, army, Indian and outlaw costume; now, tell me, how was it you joined Kansas King's band?"

"They was afther joining meself, yer honor, for yez see I was in the Injun camps and they skinned the red varmints out and tuk me, sur."

"All right; now, Tom, what shall we do with this wicked man?" and Red-Hand turned to his companion with an approach to humor on his face.

"He is a very bad man, and has been Irish farmer, American citizen, horse-thief, deserter from the army, big Injun and outlaw; but let me ask him one question before we sentence him to death."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Michael, in terror, as Tom Sun turned to him and said, in deep tones:

"Paddy McGinnis—"

"Michael Mullaney, sur—"

"Hang Michael Mullaney! Paddy McGinnis is the name I intend to put on your tombstone."

"Howly Moses! is it kill me yez will do, and thim put the wrong name above me bones? Och, sur, and St. Patrick will niver find me at the day of judgment—"

"Well, the devil will, Paddy McGinnis; now, answer me, sir: Were you ever a United States Congressman or Senator?"

"No, yer honor; it's wicked I am, but I was never that same," earnestly replied the son of Erin.

"Again, sir: were you ever a New York politician?" continued Tom Sun.

"Niver, sur, niver! Howly Moses protect me from bein' such a vile creatur."

"Then he is not as bad as we believed, so we had better spare his life, Red-Hand."

"Red-Hand! Red-Hand, is it? Howly mither protect me, for I'm dead intirely now," cried the Irishman, turning his eyes upon the stained hand of the Scout, whose face flushed slightly as he stepped forward and said in strangely kind tones:

"Michael, I have seen you before, both in the army and when you were in the Indian camp, and though you have been in bad company I do not think you so wicked but that you can be reformed."

"Come, my man, let me dress your wound, and then you must tell us all about Kansas King and his band, why they came to these Hills, their numbers, where they are encamped, and all we would know."

"It's meself that wishes yer honor miny blessings, and I'll be afther tilling you iverything yez would know," and a joyous look came into the face of poor Michael, for he felt that for the present his life was safe, and about the future he cared but little.

CHAPTER XIV.

EXTEMPORIZING A SPY.

A FEW moments passed and Michael found his wounds carefully dressed by Red-Hand, while Tom Sun was making an examination of the body of the dead outlaw.

"Here, Paddy, you are one of the same family, so I guess you are heir to them," and Tom Sun threw the Irishman a purse of money, and bag of trinkets he had taken from his slain companion.

Paddy, as the scouts insisted upon calling him, pocketed the things, and then said:

"Now, yer honors, what would yez have me afther tellin' yez?"

"First, how many men has Kansas King with him here in this mountain?" asked Red-Hand.

"Forty-seven men, includin' yonder dead spalpeen and meself that isn't dead at all, though bad luck to the chafe, he thinks I am."

"Forty-five men, then; was the chief with you to-day?"

"No, sur; he was down in the valley beyond the hill."

"How far from here?"

"Five miles about, sur."

"Is he encamped there?"

"Yes, sur."

"How long since?"

"We was afther bein' there since last night, sur."

"Did you come to the Hills right from the prairies?"

"Yis, sur; the sogers made us git away."

"And Kansas King came here for protection?"

"Yis, sur, and—"

"And what?"

"And he was afther knowin' that some immigrants had comed up hereabouts, and he wanted to take their plunder."

"And it was to rob the emigrant band, and to fly from the troops that he came?"

"Yis, sur, and to get the purty darter of Captain Ramsey, for he has taken a shine for the gal."

"Aha! that is his game! Did he not intend to establish a stronghold here, too?"

"Faith, and I believe sich was his intintion, sur, for he was afther wantin' to see the big Injun chief they call White Slayer."

"I thought as much: it has been rumored that he intended to try and form an alliance with the Indians of the Black Hills," said Red-Hand, addressing Tom Sun.

Then again turning to the Irishman, he continued:

"Paddy, you will go with me to my camp, and if you will behave yourself like a Christian, no harm will befall you, and in time you will become an honorable member of Irish society: but you know me—"

"Yis, sur."

"Well, you know I keep my word, and that I will track you to death if you deceive me, if I have to trail you to old Ireland—"

"It's yerself that's the man to do that same."

"Now, listen to me: I intend to take you into my service: if you do as I will, I will reward you; if to the contrary, I will kill you."

"Oh, Moses!"

"You are able to walk now, are you not?"

"I could dance at a wake, yer honor."

"Well, come with me to my camp, and then I wish you to return to the outlaw encampment, and gain from Kansas King all the information you can regarding his movements. If he meets White Slayer, or has any communication with any one in these Hills, return and let me know."

"I will do that same sur."

"Good: now, Tom, we are for camp, and I advise you to let Captain Ramsey know what is before him, and have all on the alert."

"There is trouble ahead, I feel confident, and if the captain will bring his party over to our camp so much the better, for it is more securely situated than his post, and we will need all our forces together, for I very much fear we will have both Indians and outlaws to fight."

"You are right, Red-Hand, and I will go."

the matter before him: in fact, he must, for the present, take refuge in your camp."

"So I would urge: now, Paddy, if when you go back to camp, the trapper is still a prisoner, try and get him away, if you can."

"I will, sur; but he's a devil's own cub to fight," said the Irishman.

"How was it you caught Lone Dick?" asked Tom Sun.

"Yer see, sur, he was a-diggin' in a hole in the ground, and we come upon him, and Bad Burke, the lieutenant, says he, 'Drag him out, boys.'"

"So, out we drags him by the heels, and, saints preserve us, but he kicked like a young mule, and it was a hard time we had puttin' the straps on him."

"Do you think he escaped when I fired upon your line?"

"Lord love yer honor, I was afther bein' occupied meself at the time, and didn't observe the vagabones."

"Very well, Paddy, now come."

A few words more and the party separated, Tom Sun taking the way over the hills toward his camp, and Red-Hand and the Irishman, after burying the dead outlaw, going down the glen toward the stronghold, where, upon their arrival, Paddy came in for a fair butt for the rest of the gay and reckless miners, who criticised freely his wonderful wardrobe, and asked him innumerable questions—for all of which he had a prompt reply.

Convinced that he could fully trust the Irishman, Red-Hand gave him a square meal and a pull at his brandy-flask, after which he again went over his instructions to him, and Paddy departed upon his duty, as a spy in the camp where a short while before he had been an acknowledged comrade.

With a virtuous look creeping over his face, Paddy left the stronghold, accompanied by the Scout, who, after escorting him a few miles on his way, left him to go on alone, while he turned off into the hills that encircled the Indian village of White Slayer, the young chief of the wild Sioux.

CHAPTER XV.

KANSAS KING, THE OUTLAW.

PEARL, the fair maiden whose home was the humble cabin in the Hills, was strangely moody after her meeting with the Scout in the gorge, and her duties were attended to in silence, her thoughts seeming far away.

Some irresistible attraction drew her toward Red-Hand—what, she could not explain, and she felt that for him she would willingly lay down her life.

Was it love that was stealing over her young and untutored heart—or was it the magnetism of a kindred spirit that drew her toward the Scout and caused her to keep him ever in her thoughts?

Though a comparative child in years, and for years the resident of a mountain hut, with only an old man, the only one of her own race who ever ran in those mountain wilds, Pearl was yet possessed of a most intelligent mind, and having been diligently taught by her father, and having around her various books, she had become educated, as it was, to a far better degree than was common with frontier maidens.

Often would her thoughts take a backward flight—to a time when she lived in a far different world, and where companions of her own age were around her; but, between that time and the present, a shadow had come, and years had blotted out much that she would have remembered.

Then again, she would long to see the world she read of in books, and sigh and weep that she was an exile from all that made life worth living for.

The saving of her life by Red-Hand put new ideas into her head, and daily she became more dissatisfied with her lot.

Yet her life at the cabin seemed changing for constantly were Indian runners arriving and departing, after holding interviews with her father, and twice a day was White Slayer wont to come to the hut, and always seek her society.

Toward the young and handsome chief Pearl had a kindly feeling, for he had once saved her life from a grizzly bear, but the idea of loving him, a red-skin, never entered her mind, and she was determined she would never enter his wigwam as his wife, notwithstanding her father had told her she should do so.

From the conversation had between White Slayer and the old hermit, Pearl soon discovered that there were two bands of whites in the Black

Hills, and that the Indians were laying their plans to massacre the whole party.

The thought sent a cold chill to the heart of the maiden, and she at once determined to frustrate their designs.

Going through the cave one morning, after White Slayer and the hermit had gone out together, Pearl soon reached a situation from whence she could obtain a fine view of the Indian village, and with surprise she noted that there were numbers of warriors in the camp, who she knew had been off for weeks on a southern trail, and hunting on the prairies.

A closer inspection also showed her that a perfect chain of Indian sentinels extended around the village, stationed upon the highest peaks of the surrounding hills; and, walking toward the council lodge on the river, were her father and White Slayer, while a large body of the principal braves were gathered there to meet them.

"All this means mischief. Yes, I know my father has set the Indians up to this work of devilment, for he has sworn not to spare a pale-face who enters these Hills.

"But they shall not be caught asleep—oh, no—he saved my life, and I will save his.

"But I must act soon, for the work of death will not be long delayed."

Thus muttering to herself the maiden retraced her way through the cave, and entering the cabin took her rifle and equipments from the rack over her cot.

"Valleolo, tell my father I will be back ere the sun kisses the western hills," she said to the Indian woman who aided her in the housework, and who answered quietly:

"There is danger in the forest and the valley—let the Pearl of the Hills hear the words of Valleolo and remain at the wigwam."

"There is no danger I fear to meet, Valleolo. I will be back at sunset."

So saying Pearl threw her rifle across her shoulder and rapidly descended the mountain side toward the bottom of the gorge, or valley, which divided the hill in twain.

Hardly had she gone half a mile down the glen, pondering in her own mind how she was to make her news known to the whites, and not compromise her father and lead him into danger, for he was ever kind to her, when swiftly walking along with downcast eyes, she was suddenly startled by a shadow falling across her path, and glancing up quickly she brought her rifle to a ready, for before her stood the form of a man.

Not an Indian warrior was he, nor Red-Hand, the Scout, nor her father; but one she had never before beheld.

He was a young man, scarcely more than twenty-five years of age, and yet with something in his face that made him appear at least thirty, for dissipation and a cruel life of crime had set their seal there.

His form was slight, but elegant, and showed to advantage in closely-fitting pants and jacket of blue navy flannel, decorated with brass buttons, and with a band of gold lace encircling each sleeve.

The bottoms of the pants were stuck in a pair of handsomely-topped cavalry boots, the heels of which were armed with silver spurs of the Mexican pattern.

A red silk sash encircled his small waist, and but partially concealed a knife and pair of revolvers.

Upon his head was a large-brimmed slouch hat, looped up upon one side with an arrow pin, and half encircled by a black ostrich plume.

The face of this stylish-looking individual would have been decidedly handsome had it not been for the reckless expression resting thereon, for the features were good, the eyes particularly fine, and a dark mustache and imperial, the same shade as his long, curling hair, added to his general appearance, which was that of a dashing, gay, young cavalry officer.

Behind the man stood a superb black steed, richly caparisoned with a Mexican saddle and bridle, and hanging to the horn of the former was a cavalry saber, while, as a companion to it, upon the other side, was a holster, from which protruded the butt of a revolver.

At sight of a man in her pathway the first act of Pearl was to bring her rifle to her shoulder; but in quiet tones the stranger said:

"Fair maid, I beg you to lower that pretty toy, for I mean you no harm."

Struck with his splendid appearance and feeling that from a pale-face she had nothing to fear, Pearl partially lowered the weapon and then said:

"Why are you here in these Hills, sir?"

"I came for pleasure, and yet I dreamed not of beholding here one so beautiful," gallantly

replied the stranger, stepping a pace nearer to her.

"Who are you, sir?" again queried Pearl, interested in spite of herself in the man.

"I am called Kansas King, fair girl."

Instantly Pearl sprung back, and like a flash her rifle covered the heart of the outlaw chief.

CHAPTER XVI

THE OUTLAW'S LITTLE GAME.

WITHOUT the quiver of a muscle Kansas King gazed upon the maiden who so threateningly held him at disadvantage, and his voice was unmoved as he asked:

"Why does my name thus offend you, fair girl?"

"You are a vile murderer, it is said, and have laid waste the homes of your own people and the villages of the red-men in wanton destruction; you are a white robber, sir," and Pearl's eyes flashed fire, for often had the Indian runners brought news to her father of the ruthless acts of Kansas King and his band.

"You paint my character in harsh tones, fair girl; but, again I say, I mean you no harm, but come here to see an old hermit, one who has dwelt for years in the Black Hills, and is a Medicine Man or Chief of the Sioux under White Slayer."

"Do you know aught of such a man, for I take it you are some waif of an Indian camp."

Pearl half lowered her rifle and said:

"If you refer to him that is known as Gray Chief, he is my father."

"Your father! Then, indeed, he is a fortunate man. Were I the kin of one so lovely I would indeed be happy."

Pearl made no reply, for compliments she was unused to, and Kansas King continued:

"Will you guide me to your father, for I would speak with him upon a matter of interest to both of us?"

Without reply Pearl drew a small revolver from her belt and fired it three times in rapid succession, the ringing reports rattling like a volley of musketry along the canyon.

"Ha! would you call aid?" cried Kansas King, quickly, and his dark eyes flashed fire.

"I have simply called my father; he will soon be here, sir."

Still maintaining her position of defense, Pearl replied to the questions addressed her by the outlaw chief, as best suited her, until the sound of running feet was heard, and the next moment up dashed the hermit and White Slayer, their rifles ready in hand.

At the sight of Kansas King the two halted, and seeing that their action was hostile the outlaw cried, speaking in the Sioux tongue:

"Hold, chiefs! I sought you here, and this maiden was kind enough to call you to me."

"Who are you?" cried the old hermit, in English, his eyes glaring savagely upon the young chief, who answered bitterly:

"I am an outlaw; one branded with a curse; men call me Kansas King!"

"Ha! you are the outlaw chief, then! What brings you here into these hills?"

"Mutual interest to you and me."

"I do not understand you."

"I will explain; I am an outlaw, and you are perhaps worse, for you dare not show your face among your fellow-men—"

"By the heaven above, but you are bold to thus address me," cried Gray Chief, furiously.

"My worst foes never called me a coward, chief; but I came not here to parley about courage or character, but to discuss a more important matter."

"You are accursed for some crime, or you would never hide in these Hills like a hunted wolf."

"I am an outlaw, a price is upon my head, and, figuratively speaking, a noose is round my neck."

"Go on, sir."

"Well, of late the troops have made it rather lively for me, because I have made it lively for the bordermen and emigrant trains, and I am compelled to have a stronghold that I can retreat to, and where none dare follow me."

"And you come here! You are a robber by trade, and what guarantee have I that you will not murder us and plunder our homes?" said Gray Chief, sneeringly.

"You have the guarantee of mutual protection, old man."

"Already are frontiersmen turning their eyes upon your Hills, and even now two bands of miners and settlers have a foothold here, one of them fortified not five leagues from this spot."

"Their course is well-nigh run; a few more

sons and their scalps will hang at the girdle of my young warriors," said the hermit.

"You think so; but, old man, those men will not be taken so easily, and if you take against them every warrior in your tribe, you will find it a hard fight to destroy them."

"Now, listen to me: one of these bands is fortified in a position that it is hard to drive them from, and that place I need for my stronghold; but I wish to be on friendly terms with you and your red-skins, and am willing to divide profits with you, White Slayer and his warriors, after each one of my raids upon the settlements."

"With my band in the Black Hills, and suffered to be friendly with White Slayer and his half a thousand warriors, no man will be fool enough to attempt to come here to settle, and there are not sufficient troops on the border to attempt to follow me here, when they know they have two forces to fight."

"You speak truly, young man."

"Of course I do, chief, and my plan is to take the miners' fort, down the glen, and there establish myself at once. The booty and the scalps may all go to you and your red-skins, and then I will attack and carry Ramsey's camp, and again the spoils go to you, except three persons."

"And those are—"

"Captain Ramsey, his son and daughter; them I claim."

"And you wish me to aid you in taking these two points?"

"Yes; but whether you do or not, I shall carry them," said the outlaw, with determination.

"Where are you now encamped?"

"Some twenty miles from here, in the lower Hills."

"How many men have you with you?"

"About a hundred."

"Divide that by two, chief, and you'll be nearer right," said Gray Chief, with a sneer.

"You attempt to drive us from these hills, and you'll think us double the number I named."

"No threats, boy, for I do not like to hear them."

"One hears many things not pleasant, chief; but we must not quarrel. Will you become my ally?"

"That I must think over; to-morrow at this hour meet me here, and you shall know whether you can remain in these Hills, or must leave."

"No treachery, mind you, old man!"

"I am no snake in the grass, boy; to-morrow, at this time, remember, and I will to-night hold council with White Slayer and his chiefs."

The outlaw bowed, kissed his hand gallantly to Pearl, sprung into his saddle and dashed down the glen, while the hermit and White Slayer turned and walked up the gorge, leaving the maiden standing in the spot where the meeting had taken place.

CHAPTER XVII

RED-HAND'S RED DEED.

FOR some moments after the departure of her father and White Slayer, Pearl stood in silent meditation, as though undecided what course to pursue.

At length her mind seemed made up, and she started down the glen, but had not taken a second step before she came to a sudden halt, for not twenty paces from her she beheld a man who had stepped from behind a large boulder and advanced toward her.

At first Pearl seemed as if she was about to fly, but checking this determination, she stood on the defensive with her rifle half-raised to her shoulder.

"I am a friend, miss, and the captain sent me back to give this to your father, miss," and the man halted near the maiden and held out his hand as if to hand her something.

He was a burly-looking fellow, clad half in buck-skin, half in home-spun, and was heavily armed with revolvers and knife.

His face was just such a one as a man wholly corrupt promises, and in it there was not one redeeming expression.

Pearl liked not his looks, and said, suspiciously:

"What captain do you refer to?"

"Kansas King, the chief, miss; I am his lieutenant, and am called Burke, miss."

"Bad Burke, is it not?" said Pearl, quietly.

"Well, my enemies do call me Bad Burke, miss, but it is because I am a bad hand with the knife, and no man dare meet me with it; but my friends don't call me Bad Burke."

"Your friends? Why, I should not think

man like you had a single friend," said Pearl, wickedly.

The face of Bad Burke turned livid with rage, and his iron muscles seemed to swell up with suppressed emotion while his evil eyes glittered like a snake's.

But, controlling himself, he forced a laugh, and said:

"Yes, miss, even a poor devil like me has friends; but, here is the paper the captain sent to your father," and he again held forth his hand.

Pearl reached forth to take what she believed a small scrap of paper, and her hand was seized in the iron grip of Bad Burke, who instantly drew her toward him, and ere she could offer the slightest resistance or cry out, his hard palm was over her mouth, and she was held as firmly as though in a vise.

But, suddenly, a dark object caught her eyes descending from a ledge of rock fifteen feet above her, and striking the burly ruffian fairly on the shoulders he was hurled bodily to the ground.

The dark object that had descended so suddenly from the rock, and lighted upon the back of Bad Burke, was a man, one who never lost his equilibrium by his jump, but caught on his feet, and stood ready with drawn knife and pistol to face the outlaw lieutenant.

When released from the grasp of the ruffian, Pearl sprung backward and again seized her rifle, which she turned upon the outlaw lieutenant.

"Hold! do not shoot him, but let him come on and face me with his knife, for he boasted a moment since that no man dare face him."

"In Satan's name, who are you?" cried Bad Burke, his hand upon his knife-hilt.

"Men call me Red-Hand: hast heard the name?"

It was evident that Bad Burke had heard the name before, for his hand quickly slipped from his knife-hilt toward a pistol-butt.

"Hold! just move one inch, ay, crook your finger, and I'll send your soul to perdition," and the pistol of Red-Hand covered the heart of the outlaw, who whined out:

"Pard, you've the advantage of a fellow and ought to let up a little."

"I will, miss, will you be kind enough to remove the pistols from that villain's belt?"

Pearl instantly stepped forward and did as directed, making a motion with the weapons as if about to murder the frightened lieutenant of bandits.

"Thank you; now, Bad Burke, we stand on an equal footing," and Red-Hand cast his pistols upon the ground.

With a suppressed yell of rage Bad Burke rushed upon his cool enemy, for now he believed he had it all his own way, as his boast was not an idle one regarding his prowess with a knife.

Calmly Red-Hand met his attacks; the blades clashed together with an ominous ring, and notwithstanding his skill and strength, Bad Burke was hurled backward, again seized in the powerful gripe of the Scout, whose keen knife gleamed in the sunlight, and then, with a crunching thud, was driven to the hilt in the outlaw's heart.

A stifled groan, and Bad Burke's cruel life had ended.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAIDEN'S WARNING.

WITH bated breath had Pearl stood and watched the deadly encounter between Red-Hand and Bad Burke; but, notwithstanding her apparent fear, the outlaw was in double danger, for had there been the slightest sign that victory would fall on him, the maiden had her rifle ready to do its deadly work.

Coolly wiping his blade on the homespun coat of the outlaw, Red-Hand returned it to its sheath, and said quickly, with a tinge of sadness in his tones:

"We meet again, fair girl, and yet it seems that between us there must always be the shadow of death. I would it were otherwise."

"I was on my way to seek you, sir, for your life and the lives of your friends are in danger," simply replied the maiden.

"My life is ever in danger; I am but a football of destiny, kicked about from place to place; but you were going to warn me of danger, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"And whither did you expect to find me?"

"At the miners' stronghold far down the glen."

"It is miles away, fair girl, and your little feet would have tired with their long walk."

"I am accustomed to long walks over the hills, sir."

"Are you not afraid of danger meeting you?"

"No sir; I have little fear."

"And yet, some days ago your life was in mortal peril, and just now you were powerless in the hands of a ruffian."

"True; but the Indians who attacked me the day you saved me were squaw-braves, sent by a young warrior whose love I had refused, and this man is an outlaw."

"You are a brave girl, and deserve a different fate from lingering here in these Hills, and living the life of a hermitess."

"Oh, I would so love to go away; but, sir, you must not stay here, for any moment some warriors may pass, and your life would certainly be the forfeit."

"I was going to warn you of danger, because I did not wish to see you and your pale-face friends massacred, and now I have double cause for saving you."

"Oh, sir, fly from these Hills, you and your friends, for even now the Sioux are assembling all their braves to attack you, and he that is called Kansas King will side with the Indians in the war against you."

"Fair girl, from my heart I thank you; but I know all that you would tell me," for, not ten minutes ago, I was on that ledge and saw and heard all that passed between your father, the White Slayer and Kansas King."

"I am glad you heard it; but you will leave these Hills?"

"No; we will show Kansas King and his Indian allies that we will not be driven from the Black Hills by fear of them," and Red-Hand spoke with bitter determination.

"Oh, what a terrible slaughter will follow! How I wish I could aid you, sir."

"You can, fair Pearl of the mountains, for such is the name your father called you, I believe. You can aid me."

"And how? Tell me and I will do all in my power," said Pearl, earnestly.

"To-morrow is the meeting between Kansas King and your father. Yonder ledge is a secret spot where you can hide, and you can reach it from the hill above. I would know the plans to be arranged between your father and the outlaw chief, and to-morrow-night, just after sunset, I will meet you here."

"I understand, sir, and I will do as you wish me to; but, tell me, please, are you Red-Hand, the Scout?"

"I am so called, Pearl; but why do you ask?"

"Because I have so often heard the Sioux warriors speak of you, and how terrible you were in battle; then numbers have gone forth upon your trail, boasting they would return with your scalp, and though many warriors have gone, you still wear your scalp-lock, and many of those braves have not returned."

"Perhaps they are looking for me in the Happy Hunting Grounds, Pearl," said Red-Hand, but his words were significant of a deeper meaning, and the maiden understood it.

"Now I must be off, fair girl; and remember—to-morrow night I will meet you; but, tell me, can I not cross this hill and strike the valley beyond?"

"Yes, sir; but oh! do not go through that valley," implored Pearl, with earnest manner.

"And why, child? Are the red-skins numerous there?"

"Oh, no, sir; an Indian would not enter that valley for a girdle of scalp-locks, and even my father dare not go there."

"Why, is it such a terrible place, Pearl?"

The maiden glanced cautiously around her, slightly shuddered, then, in a whisper, replied:

"A spirit haunts the valley, sir."

"A spirit? Nonsense!"

"No, sir! oh, no; it is the spirit of a woman dressed in white; she haunts it day and night, and when the moon is bright she sings wild songs—"

"Oh, God!"

"Oh, sir, you are sick—"

"No, no, Pearl, go on with your story; tell me all you know about the haunted valley," and the Scout passed his hand several times across his forehead, and his face became deadly pale.

"What shall I tell you, sir?" innocently asked Pearl, moved by the deep feeling of the Scout.

"When was this spirit first seen?"

"Five summers ago, since the pale-face's grave was in the valley, the spirit has been seen at times; but no warrior dare go near the valley, and those who were bold enough to invade the glen where the specter dwells, have never returned."

"Do you know aught of the grave in the valley?"

"No, sir; the Indians say he was slain there by the spirit, for the grave lies just at the entrance of the haunted valley; but my father thinks that two pale-face hunters came into the Hills after gold, and one killed the other and buried him there."

"I thank you, Pearl, for the warning you have given me about the haunted valley; but I am going to the Ramsey settlement, and it will save me many a mile to go through the glen, and I will risk seeing the spirit. Remember, to-morrow night I will meet you, and you had better not mention that you know anything of the death of Bad Burke, here."

"No, sir, I will not speak of it; but please do not go through the haunted valley."

"Have no fear, Pearl; good-by."

So saying, the Scout turned and walked down the glen, while Pearl, delighted at having met Red-Hand and warned him of danger, and yet dreading to have him risk his life in the spirit valley, walked with rapid step back to her cabin, determined to discover all in her power, the plans of her wicked father, and his Indian warriors, to bring ruin and death upon the pale-faces who had invaded the Black Hills.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TREACHEROUS CREW.

WHEN Michael Mulloney, alias Paddy, left the miners' stronghold, he was delighted at the change in his fortunes, and at once determined to lead a virtuous and happy life, for Paddy was at heart a good fellow, and circumstances which he could not control had set him drifting, until at length he found himself in an outlaw band.

Striking out with light steps across the Hills, Paddy arrived at length in the outlaw camp, and was greeted with a shout of welcome by his comrades, who believed him dead, for, when they received Red-Hand's fire, they had darted away at full speed, after seeing the Irishman fall, and confident that he had been slain.

But Paddy was hard to kill, and after seven hours' separation from his companions, turned up in camp all right, excepting a flesh-wound, which troubled him but little.

Upon his arrival in camp, Paddy told a straight lie, of how he had fallen from his horse in a swoon, and after recovering and finding no enemy near, had set out for the camp.

"You saw no trace of who it was that fired upon us?" asked Bad Burke, for Kansas King was away from camp.

"No, sir, divil a trace did I see."

"Curse him, or them, whoever they were; but come, sir, the chief gives orders that we will follow him up on a little trip he has gone on, and I need you."

"All right, sir; I'll borrow a horse at once," and Paddy felt assured that the trip of Kansas King would soon discover something regarding his future movements, and he felt glad that he had been selected to go with Bad Burke.

A short while after the outlaw officer and four companions rode forth from the camp, and at a swift pace started for the Hills up the glen.

The sun was nearing the western skies when they halted in a gulch, where they found Kansas King and two of his men awaiting them.

"Well, Burke, I have discovered with my glass the home of the old hermit chief, and I will go up the gorge alone and endeavor to speak with him. A maiden has just left the cabin and is coming down this way, so I will head her off."

"She is the girl they call the Pearl of the Hills, and is the daughter of the old hermit. She can show her claws, so the Injuns tell me, who have been in this country," said Bad Burke.

"I will have to clip her claws for her, then. You follow slowly on, and be ready to support me if you hear me call," and Kansas King tapped lightly on a small silver bugle hanging to his belt.

"I'll be on hand when you need me," answered Bad Burke, and Kansas King mounted his horse and rode on alone, leaving his companions in the gorge.

Hardly had he been gone ten minutes, when Bad Burke said, bluntly:

"See here, fellows; you all has sense and knows I picked you out to come with me, 'cause I wanted work done. Now, if any fellow here is afraid of blood, he'd better git. Who speaks?"

Not a word of reply came from either of the two men who had been with Kansas King, or the four who had come with the lieutenant.

Then Bad Burke continued:

"This country—I mean the prairies and the border—is getting too hot for our business, and we've got to git; the chief wants to locate here, and have the Injuns for a support; but it won't do, and I've got a plan, and we'll divide atween us seven—what say you?"

"I'm in for any job," said one, and the others all nodded for the lieutenant to go ahead.

"Well, I'll tell you: there is a big price offered for the head of Kansas King, and we'll arrange to run him right off from here and deliver him up to the officers at the fort, and that will get us a pardon; then I know whar there is a lot of gold and valuables buried, for I helped King to bury them, and we'll dig them up and just slide away from this country with enough metal to make us all rich. What say you?"

"When can we get the chief?" asked one.

"Why he is gone up the gorge to try and palaver with the Indians, and when he comes back we'll bag him; then I'll go up and talk to the old hermit chief, and tell him Kansas was putting up a job on him, and get him to send his warriors down after our boys, and every one of them will get the knife and lose their hair."

"Now, are you ready, boys?"

"Will we be afther making tracks from these Hills as soon as we have the chafe?" asked Paddy.

"Yes, we'll start to-night, for it is moonlight, and we will ride hard and soon leave the Black Hills behind us."

"I'm in."

"And I."

"I'm yer man."

"You bet on me."

And sundry other ejaculations of consent to the treacherous plan were given by the traitor crew, Paddy being particularly loud in his glee at the prospects ahead.

Excepting the Irishman, however, the other ruffians were sincere in their desire to betray their chief, and Bad Burke had selected the very men he knew had no love for Kansas King.

It was now arranged that Bad Burke should at once follow Kansas King, watch his meeting with the old hermit, and then go himself to Gray Chief as soon as the outlaw leader left him, and place before him a plan for surprising the band.

In the meantime, when Kansas King returned to the gorge, the six men were to throw themselves upon him, and at once make him prisoner.

Bad Burke then departed, following the trail of his chief, and from a place of concealment on the side of the hill, beheld the meeting of Kansas King and Pearl, the coming of the hermit chief and White Slayer, and then the departure of his leader back to the gorge.

Still lying quiet, he saw the two Indian chiefs return up the gorge, and leave Pearl standing where the meeting had taken place.

"Now, Burke, you need just such a gal for your wife, and now's your time to get her."

"Yes, I'll carry the gal with me, and after I have given King up to the military, I'll divide the blood-money with those fellows, and then give them the slip and take the buried treasure myself; guess I won't divide that, nor the gal either."

"No, Tom Burke, your fortune's made now, with money and a wife, and I guesses you better lize out for Texas and start a ranch, for this country won't be very healthy for you, I'm a thinking."

So saying, Bad Burke, the traitor outlaw, descended to the bottom of the gorge, and, as the reader has seen, confronted Pearl.

How his treacherous plans toward the maiden and his chief were frustrated, the reader has also seen, and that his crimes were rewarded by a death he had seemed little to anticipate.

CHAPTER XX.

SCATTERING THE VULTURES.

THE dark shadows, foretelling night, were creeping across the gorge as Red-Hand hurried over the hill after parting with Pearl. He was anxious to get on, for it was his intention to at once go to the Ramsey stronghold, and enter into some plan with Tom Sun regarding their future movements for the protection of those in the Black Hills, who looked to them for advice and aid in their danger.

Suddenly a shadow brushed across him, and in glancing quickly up to see from whence it came, he discovered the form of a man crouching down and peering over the ridge of a hill.

The sun beyond him had lengthened the man's shadow far out until it fell upon the bottom of the gorge.

A closer inspection of the form, and with delight, Red-Hand recognized the old trapper, Lone Dick, who seemed most intent in peering over into the vale beyond the ridge.

Rapidly ascending the hill, with velvet step, the Scout approached the old trapper, and gently called his name.

Like lightning Lone Dick turned and threw himself upon the defensive, but recognizing Red-Hand, he quickly called him to his side.

Approaching with caution, the Scout gazed over the ridge, as the trapper had done, and beheld the object of Lone Dick's gaze.

His eyes fell upon the gulch that concealed the outlaws, who were awaiting the coming of Kansas King and they were all six earnestly discussing some subject of great interest, to judge from their manner and gestures, while in the background stood their horses awaiting them.

"That accounts for Kansas King's boldness in his interview with the hermit chief; he had help at hand," said Red-Hand, and he then made known what he had heard over in the other gorge.

Lone Dick listened attentively, and then said: "Well, thar's gwine to be devilment hatched in these here Hills afore long, that's a fact, and that Kansas King is the boss for mischief."

"By the way, Dick, they had you prisoner, I believe," slyly said the Scout, for the old trapper had made no mention of his capture thus far.

"Fact, Red-Hand, fact: they snaked me out of a gold hole clean as a rat, you bet. Twarn't no use to scratch; they had the dead-wood on me, and I gi'n in; but it strikes me you was the individooal who did the shootin' and gi'n me a chance to slide."

"How did you get away, Dick?"

"Lord love you, I knows 'twas you that opened on these fellows, kase each shot meant bizziness, and that's a way you have o' doin'. Well, I jist got up and dusted up one of those gulches, which seem to be pretty thick in these Hills, and I kept on dartin', too, till I got in this neighborhood, when I turn my critter loose, kase he wa'n't worth powder, and I then took a snooze and was just makin' my way back to camp when I see these fellows down there, and was watchin' their hatchin' divilment, when up you come."

"Well, Dick, I am glad you are free again—hal there comes Kansas King."

As Red-Hand spoke, the outlaw chief rode into the gorge below, and suddenly five of the men threw themselves upon him, and he was dragged from his horse!

One of the men in the gorge made no movement in the capture of the chief, and the one was Paddy, the Irishman, who had been standing back in the shadow of the rock.

Suddenly observing him, Red-Hand saw that he was inactive, and wholly trusting the Irishman, he felt that the capture of the outlaw chief was not sanctioned by him, and instantly his rifle began to ring forth its rapid fire.

And, just in time to save Kansas King from his own men, for, as the Scout's rifle rung a death-knell in their midst, the chief hurled back his foes, and with a bound was in the saddle, for, though they were five to one, they had not found him easy of capture, notwithstanding he had been taken by surprise.

But an instant had elapsed since the first and last shot of the Scout, and in that time two outlaws had fallen; the chief had escaped, and the three remaining men who had thrown themselves upon Kansas King, had followed his example. Mounting their steeds, they had decamped, leaving Paddy the master of the situation.

With an air of ludicrous surprise, Paddy gazed around him, and a call from the Scout told him who had stampeded the enemy.

Instantly the Irishman began a double-shuffle of glee, and observing the Scout and trapper coming rapidly toward him, he suddenly knelt down beside the dead bodies of the two outlaws, seeing which, Lone Dick said:

"The ornery sinner is going to pray, as I'm a trapper."

"Prey on their pockets, and not for the rest of their souls, Dick," laughed Red-Hand, as he saw the huge hand of the Irishman dive first into one pocket and then the other in search of any valuables they might have about their clothes.

"Well, Paddy, what news! Did I do right in scattering that gang?" said Red-Hand, as he sprang down into the gorge, followed by Lone Dick.

"Howly Moses, but they wint off as av the divil was afther thim. Yis, sur, for that sinner alive, Bad Burke, had laid a plan to take the

chafe and sell him to Government, and we was to be the boys as was to spind the money."

"What! do you mean that Bad Burke was to betray his chief?"

"He had bethrayed him, sur, and in tin minits he'll be here expecting that all is lovely, and we have the chafe safe."

"No, Paddy, Bad Burke will never come here, for he met with an accident over the hill yonder."

"An accident, was it? Be the Howly St. Patrick, I'll wager he was afther gittin' fore-ninst your gun, sur."

"No, Paddy, he got entangled with my knife; but, what news of the plans of the robbers?"

"Divil a word, sur, exceptin' that the chafe is afther makin' a plan with the red Injuns to murder ivery mither's son av yez."

"That I know, Paddy, and I am glad to see that I can trust you. Now, I wish you to go to the stronghold with Lone Dick here, and here is a horse for each of you, and I will take Bad Burke's."

"All right, yer honor," replied Paddy, and after receiving a few more instructions from Red-Hand, Lone Dick mounted one of the horses of the slain outlaws, and the Irishman taking the other, the two set out for the miners' camp, while the Scout sprung upon the steed of the dead lieutenant and rode off in another direction.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPECTER OF THE VALLEY.

WHEN Red-Hand set forth upon his trip, alone, he wended his way in the direction of the Ramsey settlement, going toward the point which Pearl had urged him to avoid, on account of the weird stories among the Indians that a spirit haunted the valley.

As he rode along, mounted upon Bad Burke's steed, a really fine animal, the moon arose in brilliant beauty upon the wild scenery, and shed a bright light upon lofty hill, rocky gorge and lovely vale.

The story of the spirit of the valley haunted the Scout's memory with weird and bitter thoughts, for he remembered the grave made in the valley, and the apparition he had seen there after he had consigned the body of Boyd Bernard to its last resting-place.

Often had Red-Hand endeavored to convince himself that the sight was but a phantom of his troubled brain; but no; it came too vividly before him in form, gesture and song, and he felt that if he had not seen a spirit from the shadowy land, he had certainly beheld a woman.

Yet—who could this woman be who had thus been with Boyd Bernard, living alone in the wild Black Hills?

He entered the narrow gorge, the inlet to the accursed valley, and the silvery light of the moon caused every tree and boulder to stand forth in phantom-like shadow, but Red-Hand was not of a superstitious nature. Nerving himself to what was before him, he urged his steed forward at a swifter pace.

Down the valley he rode for half a mile and then the shadowy hill and large tree at its base, both of which were photographed upon his mind, loomed up before him.

Beneath that tree was Boyd Bernard's grave. Nearer and nearer he drew toward the lonely spot, and then, suddenly, his horse snorted wildly, and wheeled as quick as a flash.

Checking the steed the Scout endeavored to urge him forward, but in vain; the animal would not move an inch, but stood trembling like a whipped cur.

Springing to the ground, Red-Hand tied the nose of the animal down to his legs, so that he could not get away from him, and then muttering to himself:

"I'll solve this mystery, if I die in the attempt," he turned once more toward the tree.

Then even the brave Scout halted, for, standing at the head of the grave of Boyd Bernard was a slender form clothed in white, one arm stretched forth toward him, as if waving him back, and the masses of hair hanging down the back proved that it was a woman who thus guarded the grave.

The moonlight fell full upon her, and with a shudder he felt that it was the apparition he had beheld the night of his first coming into the valley, and which had caused him to fly in very fear from the Black Hills, when he had expected to spend a month in exploring that unknown region.

"I must go forward now; yes, I must face yonder specter, be it what it may," and having nerved himself to action Red-Hand walked boldly forward.

Nearer and nearer to the tree he drew, until the glimmer of the dark eyes were almost visible, and then he stopped short, for a strangely sad voice, striving to be firm, cried out:

"Hold! let not the foot of any man desecrate this sacred spot."

"Grant God! where have I heard that voice before?"

"No, it is not, it cannot be—for she is dead; yes, dead by her own hand," and the Scout trembled with the emotion that swept over him.

"Lady, I would not desecrate the resting-place of the dead, yet I would know why you so jealously guard the grave of Boyd Bernard?" and the Scout spoke in his deep distinct tones.

As he commenced speaking a sudden change was visible in the woman; her form bent forward and her ear was turned as if to catch every word, while her right fore-finger was pressed against her lips.

Then, in a voice that was nothing more than a hoarse whisper, she said:

"I guard his grave because I loved him—did you know Boyd Bernard?"

"Ay, did I, lady! He wretched my life!"

"Your life! Ha, ha, ha! I know you now, Vincent Vernon; I know you now in spite of the years that have swept over your accursed soul," almost shrieked the woman, raising both hands wildly above her head.

"Good God! Grace, has the grave given you up, or are you a phantom from the shadow land?" cried Red-Hand, starting toward the woman.

"Back! you red-handed murderer! Back! I say back! and do not pollute this sacred spot."

"No, I am not from the grave, and I lied to you when I said I would take my life."

"Ha, ha, ha!—no, why do I laugh? it is hollow mockery for me to laugh, and—but what do you here, thou accursed?"

"Ha! now I know by whose hand poor Boyd fell—away! away! No, no, no, do not go, but stay until I tear from you your coward heart."

In wild frenzy the woman rushed toward the Scout, a knife gleaming in her uplifted hand, and her whole bearing that of one gone mad.

Like a statue stood Red-Hand, his hands hanging listlessly by his side, his eyes bent with fixed stare upon the woman, and his whole manner that of a man struck dumb by some startling discovery, some terrible shock that had wholly unnerved him for the slightest motion.

CHAPTER XX.I

A DEATH-SCENE IN THE VALLEY.

On rushed the madwoman upon the Scout, and still he stood passive, seemingly unconscious of his danger, or unmindful of her presence, for his head was lowered upon his breast and his eyes downcast.

A few rapid bounds, a frenzied laugh, and the madwoman faced the Scout.

The arm was still poised in the air, the gleaming blade threatening instant death, and the glaring eyes, wild with madness; yet the Scout moved not. Then, with a weird cry of revengeful joy the knife began to descend, swiftly, pointed at the heart of Red-Hand.

But ere the keen blade was sheathed in the broad breast of the Scout, there came a bright flash from the dark hillside, a sharp report, and with a wild shriek the woman dropped the knife, her wrist shattered by a bullet!

The shot awoke the Scout from his apathy, and with a cry of alarm he sprang forward, crying "Grace! Grace! you are hurt."

"Back, sir! do not pollute me with your touch. Ha! still I have hope of revenge," cried the woman, and she drew with her left hand from her belt a pistol and quickly fired it in the face of Red-Hand, who staggered back, bewildered by the flash, but uninjured.

Believing that she had slain the man she seemed to hate, the unhappy woman almost shrieked out:

"Now I die content. Boyd, you are avenged, and so is—"

The remainder of the sentence was drowned in the report of her revolver, which she had placed against her heart and fired.

Too late did Red-Hand spring forward to attempt to check her act. He could only catch her falling form in his strong arms and lower her gently to the ground, just as a rapid footstep was heard, and Tom Sun dashed up with another manner, crying:

"Did she wound you, comrade?"

"No, but she has killed herself," sadly said the Scout.

"In God's name, who is she, Red-Hand?"

"One whom I knew long years ago—one whom I never harmed in thought, word, or ac-

tion, and yet who has turned against me," sadly replied Red-Hand, gazing with bitterness and sorrow down into the pale, worn, yet still beautiful face—a face that possessed an almost weird-like levelness, and a form of wondrous grace and beauty.

The eyes were large, almond-shaped, and had been full of slumbering fire; the mouth was small, yet stern, mayhap having become so in later years, and the teeth were milky-white, while a wealth of black hair hung down her back and covered her shapely shoulders.

She was dressed in a coarse garment of pure white, and moccasins incased her feet.

A belt of buck-skin, bead-worked, encircled her small waist and supported the scabbard and holster of the weapons she had endeavored to use against the Scout.

Breathing heavily, she lay in the Scout's arms, and at his words she unclosed her lustrous eyes and met his gaze.

"Grace, Grace, do you know me, or does the shadow of death lay between you and me?" softly said Red-Hand.

"Yes, Vincent Vernon, I know you, and the shadow of death does rest between us," faintly replied the woman, speaking with evident pain and difficulty, while her left hand was held tight to her side, and through the fingers oozed a crimson tide, hastening her life away.

Resting upon the grass, and staining its green with crimson, was the right hand, the wrist cruelly shattered by the bullet from Tom Sun's rifle, and as he stood there, proud, brave man though he was, his eyes dimmed with tears, as he muttered:

"I could not help it—I could not help it, for it was to save your life I fired, comrade."

"Grace," and Red-Hand's voice was strangely soft and kind.

"Grace, why did you leave me to a life of despair? Why did you wish to take my life?"

"Vincent, yonder is the grave of Boyd Bernard; answer me—did your hand place him there?"

"It did."

Even Tom Sun started at the reply, and the woman groaned aloud.

"Again, answer me: did you take my father's life?"

"Grace, in God's name! what mean you?"

"Answer me! did my father fall by your hand?"

"Never! as God is my judge."

The eyes of the woman turned full upon the Scout, and she asked earnestly:

"Vincent, would you lie to a dying woman?"

"Not! not one unkind word ever passed between your father and me."

"Thank God! Vincent, now I understand all, and—I—believe—you."

"Hold—me—up—thus! yes, the shadow of death has blinded me, and the cold hill of the grave is upon me—but I would ask you to forgive me—me, a guilty thing that has so sinned against you."

"Quick! hold down your ear and catch my words, for—the papers—all—in cabin—yonder—quick! forgive me, and—kiss me, Vincent."

The Scout murmured softly:

"Grace, I forgive."

Then his stern lips touched those of the woman just as her eyes closed and Death laid his icy touch upon her pulse and stilled it forever—

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BURIAL BY MOONLIGHT.

"Come, comrade, old fellow, the night is creeping on, and we must not linger here."

It was Tom Sun who thus addressed Red-Hand, the Scout, still bending over the frail form of the woman he had called Grace.

Two hours had passed since her spirit had winged its flight away, and yet Red-Hand had not let go the small hand, or ceased to gaze down upon the marble-like, upturned face.

"Arouse yourself, comrade. Come, I have dug a grave yonder under the hillside, just on the mossy bank of the rivulet; you can see it from here; and we must lay the poor girl away."

Still Red-Hand returned no answer, and again Tom Sun's kindly tones addressed him:

"Have you forgotten, old comrade, that many lives are dependent upon you, and that there is danger on the wind?"

"No, Tom, dear old fellow, I remember now. Let us first bury poor Grace—yes, bury her forever from sight; but I forgave her ere she died, and she believed me when I said my hand was not stained with her father's blood."

"There is a stain upon it, Tom, but not of his life. Come, let us dig a grave," and Red-Hand arose to his feet.

"The grave is dug, comrade. See, all is in readiness over there."

"Thank you, my friend, for I would not have her rest side by side with him."

"Here is my blanket, and she shall have it for a shroud; poor, poor Grace."

Softly the graceful form was enveloped in the blanket of the Scout, who then raised it tenderly in his arms and bore it to the newly-made grave, which Tom Sun had thoughtfully filled in with poles, cut from a thicket near by, which served as a rude coffin.

Into her last resting-place the poor woman was lowered, and the blanket drawn over the beautiful sad face, upon which Red-Hand gazed with a stern, hard look that proved how deeply he suffered.

A few moments more and the dirt was thrown in most tenderly by Tom Sun, who seemed to feel to the very soul for his friend, while Red-Hand stood with uncovered head and folded arms gazing down upon the grave which held one that he had certainly loved most dearly in bygone years, and who had so strangely crossed his path in the wilds of the Black Hills—crossed his path to die by her own hand before his very face.

"Now, comrade, I have much to thank you for; but we must not linger here, for the living demand our care."

"Some day I will make known to you the story of my life, in all its cruelty and sorrow; but not now—no, not now."

"But, tell me, how was it I found you here, Tom?" and with an effort Red-Hand seemed to bury his grief, and assume his olden manner.

"Things began to look squally, pard, and I started over to your lay-out to look you up, when I ran against Paddy and Lone Dick, and they told me you had struck for my camp, so I put after you over the hills, missed the valley, and came down the slope just in time to—but we won't speak of that now, comrade; but tell me, what is to be done?"

In a few words Red-Hand told his brother scout all the discoveries he had made since coming to the Black Hills, and then continued:

"That we are going to have a hard time, Tom, is evident, and my advice is to at once vacate your lay-out, and move bag and baggage to our stronghold, which we can hold against every Indian in these Hills; yet to be on the safe side, I have a plan to save the women, and that is to bring them here."

"Here! how will that protect them?"

"You have heard of the Haunted Valley of the Black Hills? Well, this is the valley, and no Indian of the Sioux tribe, or outlaw either, will ever penetrate into these wilds."

Tom Sun was a borderman of sound sense, and yet to a certain degree superstitious, and often had he heard Indian stories of the spirit valley, and he glanced somewhat nervously around him when told he was then in that weird locality, and Red-Hand continued:

"Tom, you and I know now the spirit that has haunted this valley, and we also know that this place will be sacred from intrusion, and here I will bring the women and children, and you, Tom, and Lone Dick, Paddy, Captain Ramsey and his son must be their guard."

"And you, comrade?"

"Will take my chances with the men at the lay-out. Now, old fellow, you heard—heard—Grace speak of her cabin?"

"Well, I'll strike the trail leading to it, put things right there, to welcome the women and children, and will then meet you at the upper end of this valley and guide you there."

"You mean for the party to leave the settlement to-night, then?"

"Yes, for the Indians will begin to move soon."

"Yonder is the horse I took from Bad Burke; mount him, and ride in all haste to the Ramsey camp; have the women and their party pack up at once, mount and hasten to the head of the valley, with all the necessary stores and traps for a long siege; then tell the men to move off with all due haste for the miners' camp, and, mind you, Tom, they must be well on their way by daylight, for we have no time to lose."

"I am off at once, Red-Hand, but really I do not like to leave you alone in this valley," said Tom Sun, reluctantly.

"It matters not, Tom—the dead can do no harm, and the living I have little fear of here."

"I'll do as you wish, comrade. It is now about two hours to midnight. Before day I will be at the head of the valley."

So saying, Tom Sun went to the outlaw's stall, mounted him, and the rattle of his hoofs echoed dimly through the Hills as he rode rapidly on his way to the Ramsey camp, leav-

ing Red-Hand alone in the Haunted Valley—
alone with the dead.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEETING IN THE CANYON.

WHEN Kansas King rode into the midst of his treacherous followers, he certainly would have been captured by them, in spite of his gallant resistance, had it not been for the diversion in his favor, created by Red-Hand's fatal shots, which laid two of the outlaws low.

A man of lightning thought and ready action, he did not stop to inquire into the cause of this move in his favor, or who had aided him, but hurled back the dead man who had held his throat and, with a bound, was astride of his splendid steed and dashing down the glen.

His companions rapidly followed, but knew not what to do, for they felt that their chief would visit vengeance upon them, or even then might be ambushed ahead to shoot them down; while believing that they had been betrayed by Bad Burke, whom they really had little confidence in, they concluded they would run the lesser risk for their lives and shove out for the prairies once more, where they could turn their attention to other pursuits that would gain them a living, but whether an honest one or not they were not particular.

Being good frontiersmen they took their bearings and struck for the low-lands in all haste; but as they were never seen again on the border, and the skeletons of three men and their horses were found upon the banks of the Niobria river, a year after, it is to be surmised that a violent death rid the settlers of their unwholesome society.

To return to their chief: after his flight from the gulch he urged his horse rapidly on, convinced, by the absence of Bad Burke, that he it was who had plotted the attack against him, for of late he had somewhat suspected the faith of his burly lieutenant.

Swearing vengeance against Bad Burke, if he should ever lay his hands upon him, or any of the treacherous crew who had entrapped him, Kansas King rode on at a sweeping gallop until mile after mile had been cast behind him, and his stronghold was not far away.

Fearing treachery there, also, upon the principle that a "burnt child dreads the fire," the chief determined to make a flank movement upon his camp, and approach it from the hills overhanging the vale where they were encamped, so that in case his suspicions of danger to himself were aroused he could withdraw immediately and rapidly, and returning to the cabin of the Hermit Chief throw himself upon his protection, telling him frankly his men had turned traitors.

With this intention he changed his course, and turning into a narrower canyon which he knew would lead him round toward the hills overhanging his camp, he urged his horse into a gallop, to suddenly rein him back upon his haunches with terrible force, for the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching through the gorge startled him.

Drawing his revolver, Kansas King sat quietly awaiting the coming stranger, whoever it might be, and an exclamation of delighted surprise broke from his lips as a steed dashed around the bend, bearing upon his back—a woman!

Yes, a woman; nay, a young girl, for she was none other than Ruth Ramsey, who, quickly discovering an unlooked-for obstacle in her path, attempted to draw rein: but too late; her steed was a willful animal not easily checked, and ere she could come to a halt the outlaw leader spurred alongside of her, and his left hand grasped her bridle-rein.

"Leo Randolph! You here?"

It was all the maiden could say, and across her face swept a deathly pallor.

"Yes, sweet Ruth, your lover of long syne days is delighted to behold you, once more," said the chief, with a tone of irony in his voice.

"Yes, it was proven he was an outlaw—the leader of a wild and desperate band; men called him Kansas King because he ruled the border and none dare face him.

"Yes, all these things were proven, and—and—I found I had loved unworthily," and Ruth spoke half aloud, her eyes downcast, as though musing with the past.

"Ruth, all these things were told against me; yes, it was proven that I had been brought up by a fond mother who idolized her boy, yet upon whose life a stain rested, and hence the curse fell upon the son.

"That mother died, Ruth, and then came the

news to her son that a brand rested upon his life.

"Was it any wonder, then, that he threw away the advantages bestowed upon him by his loving mother, and became a wild and reckless outcast?"

"Oh, Ruth, you know not how I have suffered, and what a curse, a misery my life has been; and if you knew you would pity me—and pity begets love—'tis said—ay, you did love me once, Ruth," and the chief laid his hand softly upon the gloved hand of the maiden, who, quietly withdrawing, replied kindly:

"I thought I loved you once, Leo; but I knew not my heart; and yet had your life been different, and not a blot upon the earth, we might have been more to each other than lovers; but you have not forgotten that when my father exiled you from our home, and I told you I did not love you, you basely endeavored to carry me off."

"No, Ruth, I have not forgotten; but I loved you, and that must be my only excuse. I longed to have you with me, to have you my bride, and—forgive me, Ruth—I was mad enough to think that I might persuade you to become my wife."

"My consent never could have been won by force, Leo Randolph; but, this is idle to thus stand and talk with you. Believe me, I feel for you in the evil career you have chosen, and—but I must hasten, for the night is coming on, and I was foolish to venture thus far from the fort," and Ruth attempted to ride on, but the outlaw chief still kept his hand firmly upon her rein, while he asked:

"How is it you are thus far from your camp, and alone?"

"I came out with my father and brother for a ride. They discovered traces of Indians near the fort, and rode on to investigate, telling me to return, for I was not half a mile away. I lost my road, and only just now discovered that my way back lay through this gulch," hastily said Ruth, and again she urged her horse forward, yet the chief held him firmly in his strong grasp.

"Mr. Randolph, will you release my bridle-rein?" said Ruth in a firm voice.

"Miss Ramsey, I will not—hold! hear me, and heed:—you are in my power, and I am a desperate man.

"Go with me willingly; become my wife, and I will relinquish my evil life and live for you alone; refuse, and—"

"You plead in vain, Mr. Randolph; your evil life has already put out every spark of regard I ever felt for you.

"Again I ask you to release my rein."

"And again I say I will not; nay, more—if you will not be a willing bride, you shall be an unwilling one."

"God have mercy upon me," groaned poor Ruth, and she reeled as if about to fall from her saddle.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ANSWERED CRY.

THE moonlight that fell weirdly upon the Haunted Valley, and lighted up the sad scene enacted there, also cast its silvery radiance upon the mountain hut of the Hermit Chief.

Pacing to and fro in the moonlight, with quick, nervous tread, was Gray Chief, his brow dark, and lips set stern and hard, for a few moments since the White Slayer and his chiefs had left after the council held there, and which had determined a deadly extermination of every pale-face in the Black Hills—ay, all, for the proud Indian warrior, whose forefathers before him had ruled the destinies of this tribe, would not become the ally of outlaws, and plainly had he told the Hermit so.

And Gray Chief had been pleased at the decision of White Slayer, for to him all white men were enemies, he said, and he desired that not only should the miners perish, but also the outlaws.

Then it was agreed between them that they should seem to agree to Kansas King's arrangement for an alliance, and by so doing disarm suspicion, and get himself and men in their power, and then the Sioux warriors would fall upon them and not a man should escape—no, not one, swore the Hermit Chief.

Having thus disposed of their would-be allies, the Indians could arm themselves with the weapons taken from the outlaws, and then make war upon the two camps of the invaders, and they, too, should fall.

The old hermit chuckled gleefully as he laid his plans, and saw how eagerly the Indians agreed to them, and yet had he known that

within the cabin window stood one who heard every arrangement made, and after learning all she could, arose from her crouching attitude, and stole away, he would not have walked the ledge in the moonlight, gloating over his diabolical invention to rid the Black Hills of every pale-face who had invaded their unknown fastnesses.

Yes, after parting with Red-Hand, Pearl had returned home and learned from Valleolo that the chiefs were to assemble at once, and instantly had the maiden secreted herself in her room, and from her ambush learned their plans, after which she hurried away through the cavern, descended the hills to the Indian village, and quickly mounted a splendid horse which White Slayer had captured in battle and presented to her.

Like the wind she then rode through the valleys and over the hills, directing her course toward the Ramsey settlement, as she dared not take the lower canyon leading to the fort of the miners.

At length she drew near the spot where she had been told the pale-faces were encamped, and was just turning into the narrow gulch leading to the stockade fort, when she heard a loud cry for help.

"Help! help! Oh, Heaven, save me!" again rung the cry, and in a woman's voice.

With the impulsiveness of her nature, Pearl was about to dash at once to the rescue, when there came the sound of coming hoofs, and the next instant, riding up the gulch, she beheld two steeds, bearing a man and a maiden, the former holding the latter firmly in her saddle, and at the same time grasping with his other hand the bridle-rein of her horse.

They were Kansas King and Ruth Ramsey, and infuriated at her refusal of his love, the outlaw chief was bearing the maiden by force to his camp, in spite of her heartrending cries for help.

"Hold!"

The voice was that of a woman, and yet it had in it a stern and determined ring that brought the robber-chief and his captive to a sudden halt.

Before them, seated upon her horse, and with her rifle leveled at the broad breast of Kansas King, was Pearl, the Maid of the Hills.

And at the command Kansas King drew rein, and quickly said:

"Well, girl, what would you?"

"That you ride on and leave that maiden alone," firmly replied Pearl.

"Ha, ha! a stern command from such sweet lips; but, what if I refuse?"

"I will kill you."

"Harsher still, my mountain beauty; but your aim may not be true, and—"

"One wave of my hand, Kansas King, and you might find out how true is my aim. Do you think the Pearl of the Hills a fool that she comes this far from her home unprotected?" and the maiden spoke as though there were a hundred warriors at her back.

The outlaw chief glanced somewhat nervously around, and doubtless believing that the rocks and trees did conceal innumerable red-skins, he said:

"You hold the winning card, fair Pearl of the Hills. I yield to the command of sweet lips, which yet I may punish for their unkind words with a kiss.

"Ruth Ramsey, we will meet again.

"Fair maids, I bid you good-evening."

Then, with a muttered curse, Kansas King drove his spurs deep into the flanks of his steed, and dashed away up the gulch at a mad speed.

Yet, ere the rattle of his steed's hoofs died away, there resounded through the canyon the heavy tramp of many feet, and in dismay, Ruth cried:

"Come; oh, come, for the Indians are coming!"

Pearl listened an instant, and then said:

"No, those are not Indians, for I hear the iron ring against the rocks of pale-face horses; they are your friends."

Ere more could be said a long line of horsemen filed around a bend in the canyon, and did they prove friendly or hostile, it was then too late to fly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNCLE SAM'S BOYS.

THE column of horsemen that were filing at a slow trot through the canyon were, as Pearl had said, not Indians, but pale-faces, and with a half-cry of joy, Ruth saw that they were troopers, dressed in the uniform of United States cavalry.

It was a squadron of less than a score, and at

their head rode a young and dashing officer of perhaps twenty-five years of age.

At a glance, woman-like, both the maidens took in his superb form, splendid seat in the saddle, stylish uniform and broad shoulders, with the straps of a captain thereon.

Then they saw his handsome, daring face, with its dark, earnest eyes, and firm mouth, shaded by a dark mustache.

Certainly he was an elegant-looking young officer, and into his frank, noble face, the two maidens, the daughter of the prairie, and the child of the hills, gazed with admiration and perfect trust.

With surprise upon his face, a pleased surprise he did not attempt to conceal, the young officer drew rein before the two maidens, whose horses stood side by side across the canyon, and respectfully raising his plumed hat, said, pleasantly:

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure—meeting ladies in these wild hills."

"And a particular pleasure, sir, to us, at least to me, for there is certainly need for yourself and troopers here," replied Ruth, while Pearl remained silent, and the young captain again said:

"My instructions were to come into these hills, and order from it all white settlers that had invaded them, for Government must protect its contract with the red-skins, who have exclusive right to this country.

"I expected to find here a band of rude miners—certainly not any ladies."

"I, sir, am the daughter of Captain Ramsey, who was the leader of a small party of settlers into this country, who came here to establish homes and also dig for gold; this maiden I never met until ten minutes ago when she saved me from a terrible fate—a fate to which death was preferable," and Ruth spoke with exceeding earnestness.

"Indeed! This young lady then does not belong to your settlement."

"Can there be another band of settlers in these hills?" said the officer, in surprise, gazing with admiration upon Pearl's lovely face, who flushed slightly, to find herself the object of such ardent notice, and replied:

"I was on my way to warn the pale-faces of danger, when I came suddenly upon this lady and Kansas King, the outlaw, who was forcing her to accompany him."

"Warn the pale-faces of danger? Are you not a pale-face?" asked the astonished soldier.

"I am a pale-face, yes; now, I cannot say more than that I was going to tell the settlers that White Slayer and his band were to move to-morrow night upon their forts, and that there was no hope for them unless they at once fled from these hills."

"And you! Are not you in danger?" said Ruth Ramsey, earnestly.

"No, I am not in danger; but oh, fly from the red devils who will soon be on the war-path against every pale-face who has lately come into the hills."

"You bring sad news, miss, and yet I fear true tidings, as I know the bitterness of the Indians to those who would settle here; to-morrow night, you say, they will commence the attack?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Major Wells will not be up before day after to-morrow, hasten as he may, and I have but fourteen men with me," thoughtfully said the cavalryman.

"You have other troops coming, then, sir?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"Yes, over a hundred troopers; I was merely an advance guard; here, Wentworth, hasten back with all dispatch and ask Major Wells to ride his horses down but what he reaches here to-morrow night," and the captain turned to a horseman who was half scout, half soldier, and a bold-looking fellow, who promptly replied:

"I'll fetch him, Captain Archer, if hoofs can make it!"

"Do so, Wentworth, and bring him to this point, do you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and away dashed the courier, at full speed.

"Now, young ladies, there is but one thing for me to do, and that is to go secretly into camp near here and await the attack upon the fort, and then endeavor to make the red-skins believe a large force of cavalry has come to the assistance of the settlers."

"Were the Indians to know that I had but my present force they would little fear me, so I beg that you keep my presence in the hills a secret, and in the time of need I will be on hand."

"My orders, Miss Ramsey, are to protect the

Indians in the possession of their lands, and also to protect the lives of the settlers, though I drive them from the Black Hills."

"I will guide you to a safe place, sir, where you could conceal a hundred men," volunteered Pearl, and then she considerably added:

"It is getting dark now, and we should first see this lady home."

"True. Miss Ramsey, we will ride with you to within a short distance of your camp," replied the young officer, and the cavalcade at once moved off, Pearl guiding, and as they rode along the two maidens and the young soldier chatted pleasantly together.

At length the glimmer of lights in the stockade was visible, and the party halted, while Ruth, after bidding adieu to the captain, kissed her new-found friend and rode on alone.

Then away dashed Pearl, side by side with the captain, and behind came the troopers riding in Indian file.

A gallop of two miles brought them to one of those gorges so common in the Black Hills, and into this Pearl led the way until they came to a small glen, fertile and well watered.

"Here you can rest secure, sir. If there is any change in the plans of the Indians I will come and let you know," said Pearl, and then she made known to the officer all that had transpired, and with which the reader is already acquainted.

In surprise and astonishment the young man listened to the maiden, and then said, kindly, taking her hand:

"The settlers have much to thank you for, miss, I assure you, and it is noble of you to thus warn them of danger, at the risk of your life, for I feel that you are an inmate of the village of the Sioux to thus know their plans."

"This, I hope, will not be our last meeting, and in full sincerity I say, if in any way I can befriend you, command me. My name is Edwin Archer, and I am a captain in the —th cavalry now on the prairie border."

Pearl made no reply, waved her hand pleasantly, and away bounded her steed on the return to the Indian village.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FAIRY GLEN.

WHEN Ruth Ramsey returned to the stockade she found the whole settlement about to turn out in search of her, and delighted at her return, for they had believed her lost, or captured by the Indians, as her father and brother had returned some time before, and reported that she had started home.

Ruth made known her startling adventure with Kansas King, her rescue by a strange pale-face maiden; but the coming of the cavalry she kept to herself, as the officer had requested her to do.

The settlers were all in a state of fermentation at the hostile position assumed by the Sioux, and the coming into the hills of Kansas King and his band, for Tom Sun had made known the adventure of Red-Hand and the outlaws, and advised that the settlers should move over to the miners' fort until after the battle they knew must come with the Indians.

There were some who declared against the move, unwilling to leave off their gold-digging, and thus a war of words was progressing when suddenly Tom Sun appeared in their midst, and at once his report settled the matter.

Two hours after the stockade was deserted by one and all, and the men at once set off for the miners' camp, excepting those designated to go with the women and children into the Haunted Valley.

A mile from the stockade the party divided, with many tears, kind wishes, and tender farewells, and Tom Sun led his precious charge by the nearest route to the valley where Red-Hand awaited them.

An hour's tramp, and just as the east grew rosy with the approach of day they entered a narrow gorge, the western inlet to the valley.

Ahead of them Tom Sun suddenly descried a tall, upright form, coming toward them.

It was Red-Hand, the Scout; but oh, how pale, hard and stern his face had grown in one night!

Yet he bowed pleasantly to the party, pressed lightly the hand Ruth extended to him, and said, simply:

"Come."

Leading the way through the beautiful yet strangely wild glen, Red-Hand turned, after a walk of a third of a mile, into a thick piece of timber, through which ran an indistinct trail.

A still further walk through the woods, of two hundred yards, and before them arose the precipitous and lofty sides of the mountain, pierced

by several narrow gorges, that appeared like lanes through the massive hills.

Into one of these chasms, for they were hardly anything more, Red-Hand walked, and soon it widened into a perfect bowl, with towering walls upon every side.

It was a fairy spot, and where one would love to dwell and dream away a lifetime, far away from the cares of the world.

And there, sheltered against the base of the lofty hill, was a neat little cabin home—a hermitage in the hills.

It was an humble abode, built of stout logs, and yet around it was an air of comfort, while the interior, consisting of two rooms, certainly looked cozy and most comfortable, for the furniture, though of rude manufacture, was useful, and around the walls were many articles of use and enjoyment, from rifles, knives and pistols, cooking utensils, and a very fair selection of books.

"This was her home; from here to his grave is but a short distance, and her going there has marked a distinct trail."

"Tom, last night I made strange discoveries."

So softly said Red-Hand to his fellow scout, and then, turning to Captain Ramsey, he bade him keep his party in the gorge, and that Tom Sun would return, as soon as he had accompanied him to the miners' camp.

Promising to bring the anxious mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, good news, Tom Sun set out with Red-Hand for the fort, which they knew, before many hours would be the scene of a terrible border battle, and that he had doubts as to a result in favor of the whites was evident, from Red-Hand's remark:

"Tom, if it comes to the worst, why, you can wait in the gorge until the Indians believe you escaped before the fight, and then make for the settlement with all haste."

"I will do all I can, comrade; but I hate to have you run the risk of such a forlorn hope."

"Never mind me, old fellow! but if we do go under, why, red-skins' scalps will be a drug in the market," and Red-Hand smiled, a sad smile, upon his stern, sorrowful face.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WAR-CRY AND THE SURPRISE.

NIGHT, serenely beautiful, with its silver moon lighting up the bold scenery upon every hand, settled upon the Black Hills, and the shadow of the mountains fell upon the miners' fort, where all seemed lost in deep repose.

But the silence resting there was a treacherous one, for within those stockade walls were half a hundred brave men resting upon their arms, and awaiting the coming of their foes, which all knew were to hurl themselves against them that night.

Since the day before, when he had left the valley retreat with Tom Sun, Red Hand had been constantly on the move, scouting about the hills, and his reconnoissance had wholly discovered the intended plan of attack decided upon by the Indians.

According to promise, Pearl had met him in the gorge and told him that from the ledge she had witnessed the coming of Kansas King, and heard all that had passed between him and her father, who had told the outlaw chief that the night following he would come to his camp with five hundred warriors, and that they would together move on the miners' stronghold.

Kansas King had agreed to Gray Chief's plans, and then took his departure, apparently satisfied with the good faith of his allies, while the old hermit laughed in his sleeve at the way he had fooled the outlaw, for it was his intention that very night to hurl his whole force upon the robber camp, and, after a general massacre, to divide his warriors into two parties and at once attack the two pale-face encampments.

As soon as he learned the plans of the Indians, and also heard from Pearl about the arrival of the cavalry in the Black Hills, Red-Hand at once set out on his return to the stronghold, going by the way of the gorge where the troopers were encamped, and holding a long conversation with Captain Edwin Archer, with whom he was well acquainted, having often met him at the forts on the border.

Arriving at the stronghold, Red Hand at once arranged his forces to meet the attack, and then all awaited the coming storm of battle.

Whether Kansas King suspected the Hermit Chief of bad faith, or determined to strike a blow himself, against the settlements, is not known; but certain it is, that, as soon as darkness set in, he moved his men at once toward the Ramsey stockade, and after a gallant charge up to the walls, discovered that the occupants had deserted the place.

Chagrined at this discovery the outlaw chief rode with all due dispatch toward the stronghold of the miners, and arrived there about the time that Gray Chief and his red warriors reached the camping-ground of the robbers, to find that they had fled.

With rage at the move of Kansas King, the Indians at once set out for the Ramsey settlement, gloating over their anticipated revel in blood, and again were they doomed to disappointment, and in fear that their enemies had escaped them they rode rapidly for the stronghold of the miners.

Ere they had arrived, however, they heard the rattle of firearms, and then it flashed across the Hermit Chief that Kansas King had outwitted him, and was determined to alone take the plunder from the miners, and reduce their stronghold to ashes.

Urging his braves to press on with all haste, the firing grew louder, and then the fort came in sight, the flashes of the rifles lighting up the dark mountain-side.

As the band of warriors pressed on, Kansas King suddenly confronted the Hermit Chief, and with coolness said:

"Well, old man, you procrastinated too much, so I have begun the fight."

Both men felt that the other was playing some deep game; yet they were anxious to then receive aid, the one from the other, for the outlaws had already suffered severely, and at a glance the Hermit Chief and White Slayer felt that the stronghold would not be easily taken.

So they concluded to fight together against the miners. The Indians were thrown into position, and the battle at once raged in all its fierceness.

In vain was it that the outlaws, under their reckless young leader, hurled themselves against the stockade walls; in vain that the warriors resorted to every cunning artifice known to them. The brave little garrison poured in constantly a galling fire upon their enemies, and many an outlaw and Indian bit the dust.

"Come, this will never do. We must charge in column with our whole force and throw ourselves over the walls. I will lead," cried Kansas King, almost wild with fury at the stubborn resistance of the gallant defenders.

"It is the only chance, I see. Here, White Slayer, form your men for a bold rush," replied the stern old Hermit Chief, and then, with demoniacal yells the mad column of outlaws and red-skins started upon the charge.

Like hail the leaden bullets fell in their midst; and terrible was the havoc; but on they pressed—Kansas King, the Hermit Chief, and White Slayer at their head.

On, still on, until the dark column reached the stockade, and springing upon the shoulders of his braves, the daring White Slayer was the next instant upon the top of the wall, his wild war-whoop echoing defiance and triumph.

But ere the echo died away, a tall form sprung beside him from the inner side of the wall; then came the gleam of a knife, a thud, another glitter of the blade, and the brave young chief was hurled back among his warriors cut to the heart, and scalped.

Then arose a wild war-cry, well known to many there, and those who had heard it before knew that Red-Hand, the Scout, had slain their chief.

Yet the Sioux still held their ground, and in a dozen places were scaling the walls, when behind them came a ringing order in trumpet tones:

"Troopers to the rescue—charge!"

Then was heard the hearty cheer of regular soldiers, a rattling of sabers, a heavy trampling of many hoofs, and upon the rear of the attacking force rushed a squadron of cavalry, half a hundred strong, and at their head rode Captain Edwin Archer.

The sight that followed was a scene of terrible carnage, for in wild dismay the Indians and outlaws fled, the battle lost to them at the moment they believed victory their own.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DRIVEN TO HIS LAIR.

As the stampede became general, two men mounted their horses and dashed rapidly away up the gorge.

But upon their track rode a small party that had dashed out of the stronghold in hot pursuit, and had been joined by two others, who gladly gave chase.

The two who were flying in advance for their lives, were the Hermit Chief and Kansas King, both bitterly cursing their misfortune.

The three men who had ridden from the

stronghold in pursuit were Red-Hand, Lone Dick and Paddy—all well mounted.

The two horsemen who had joined in the chase were Captain Archer and Tom Sun, the latter having left the retreat in the valley to guide the troopers to the rescue of the stronghold, for true to his word, Wentworth, the courier, had brought on at mad speed all the cavalymen whose horses could stand the hard ride, leaving Major Wells and the remainder of the battalion to follow more leisurely.

There were five men in hot chase of the Hermit Chief and the outlaw leader—five men determined to capture them or die in the attempt.

On flew the two chiefs up the dark gorge, and like bloodhounds on the trail, rode Red-Hand and his followers.

Up the valley, over the hills, through canyon, up to the base of the hill whereon stood the hermit's cabin.

Here the two fugitives sprung from their horses and darted up the steep ascent.

But close behind them was Red-Hand, and strung out behind him were the other four.

At last the ledge was reached, and upon it the lion turned at bay, for he saw that the Scout was close behind him.

Like an enraged beast the Hermit Chief cried: "Tracked to my lair at last—at last; but, Vincent Vernon, you shall die!"

With gleaming knife the old hermit sprung forward, but Red-Hand, with a cry of rage, as though he recognized the man before him, and had some bitter injury of the past to avenge, met him with a terrible earnestness—ay, met him to hurl him back from him with a strength that was marvelous, and with one plunge of his blade sent its keen point deep into the broad bosom of his foe.

One stifled cry, and the Hermit Chief fell back his full length upon the hard rock, just as Kansas King, who had found the door of the cabin barred against him, turned also at bay, to be met by a blow from the pistol butt of the gallant Paddy, which felled him, stunned, to the earth.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

UPON the rocky ledge, in front of the cabin, the moonlight streamed with almost noonday brilliancy, and lighted up a strange scene.

Lying upon the rock, and supported by Lone Dick, was the Hermit Chief, his long gray beard and hair shining like silver in the moonlight, and his broad chest heaving with every hard-drawn breath—for the hermit had received his death-wound.

Standing near was Kansas King, a blood-stain upon his forehead, from a wound made by the butt of the Irishman's pistol.

The face of the hermit was pallid with pain and some inward emotion of bitterness.

The face of the man whose deeds had won him the name of Kansas King, was still unmoved and reckless.

In front of these men stood their five pursuers, Red-Hand slightly in advance, and he was speaking, while his deep voice was stern and almost cruel in tone.

He was saying:

"Carter Bainbridge, you have but a short time to live, and ere your soul takes its flight, I would have you speak, if the story I am now about to relate is not true in every word."

After a moment the hermit replied:

"Hell has certainly aided you, Vincent Vernon, in letting your hand take my life; tell all you wish to, for I care not now—no, not now—ha! there comes Pearl."

At that moment the maiden rushed from the cabin, and beholding the strange scene and the hermit lying wounded upon the rock, cried, "Father! my father! are you dying?"

Quickly Red-Hand stepped forward, and restraining her, said:

"Maiden, this man is not your father—waste not your pity on him."

"Not my father! Oh, surely you are—"

"He tells the truth, Pearl; I am not your father. Listen and he will tell you all," and the hermit spoke with difficulty.

"Yes, I tell the truth, as you shall all hear."

"Many years ago, in a New England State, I was living with my widowed mother, my father, a naval officer, having died when I was a mere lad."

"My mother had wealth, and being youthful and handsome, had many admirers."

"When I was fifteen years of age I first saw this man—Carter Bainbridge—known to you all as the Hermit of the Black Hills."

"This man became, as I believed, the husband of my mother, who loved him dearly, and so

did I; but, alas, his was a black heart, for already had he a wife living in a Southern State—the mother of a son whom this man brought to our house after his marriage with my mother, and passed off as his nephew."

"From the day of that son's arrival, there began a plot for my mother's and my wealth, for the pretended nephew was as bad as his professed uncle."

"At length I entered the navy as a midship man, and after an absence of three years returned to find my mother dead."

"Then I suspected no evil, but after investigation proved that this man had cruelly taken my mother's life."

"Again I went to sea, and I left this man and his son at my house, as I believed; but the son, as a common seaman, shipped on my vessel, and as I was pacing the deck one night in a hard blow, I was thrown overboard by a sailor who approached me unawares."

"The vessel went on, for none had seen the act, and I would have been lost had not a schooner picked me up not twenty minutes after I was hurled into the sea."

"Returning home again I found the father and son, whose fright at my appearance I took for surprise and joy, for all believed me lost, and the man who had thrown me into the sea had left the vessel at the first port and returned to report his success."

"Dwelling in the same town where was my home, was a physician and his daughter, an only child."

"That maiden I loved with my whole heart, and ere I again went to sea she became my wife."

"And yet with perfect trust I left her at home with my supposed step-father and his son, while her father, the doctor, accompanied me to sea as my guest, for his health was in a precarious condition, and he believed a sea voyage would benefit him."

"When in Spain, a year after my marriage, word came from my wife of the birth of a little daughter, and my father-in-law, who was still with me, urged that I should resign and return home."

"I followed his advice, and together we were to sail for London, and yet the night before we sailed from Spain, when my father-in-law and myself were returning to the hotel late in the evening, an assassin sprung from a dark corner and struck him to the heart with a knife."

"Strange to say I was arrested as his murderer, and sent to America for trial, for he was a man of vast wealth, and my wife was his only heir."

"For nearly two years I lay in prison, and then was acquitted, for no proof could be found against me."

"And yet, in all that time my wife did not come near me, nor did my step-father or his son."

"At last I left my cell, and returned to my home, to find I had no home, no wife, no child."

"This man, Carter Bainbridge, had sold my whole property that he could lay hands on, and my wife had gone off with the son, whose name was Boyd Bernard."

"My child, I was told, was dead, and I believed it, especially when I received a letter from my misguided wife, bidding me farewell, and telling me that she intended to die by her own hand."

"Considerable property, left me by an aunt, I still had, and with money at my disposal, I started to hunt down Carter Bainbridge and Boyd Bernard."

"It was a long and tedious work, but I tracked this old man, step by step, for a long time, and discovered much of his evil life—ay, I discovered that he had deceived another woman who believed she became his wife, and was then cast off by him, after he had robbed her of her wealth, and left her and her boy to starve."

"That woman was the mother of the man known as Kansas King."

With breathless suspense had all listened to the story of Red-Hand, and yet none were prepared for the sudden and startling assertion he made regarding the parentage of the outlaw chief.

As for Kansas King, he stood amazed and silent—for a moment—and then said, bitterly:

"Scout, I feel that you speak the truth; tell me, old man, am I your son?"

"Is your right name Leo Randolph?" faintly asked the hermit.

"So men call me; but if my parentage was dishonorable, I hold no claim to any name."

"You are then my son."

"Good God! Well, if I am hung by Captain Archer here, my fate will be the proper thing, I suppose, and yet I prefer hanging to acknowl-

edging you as my father," and the outlaw spoke with terrible bitterness in his tone.

Then Red-Hand continued in the same deep tones:

"At length I tracked this man to his home, and—I believe I killed him, for I drove my knife deep into his side, and it was the first time my hand was stained with blood, though from my birth I have borne this mark which has given me my name upon the frontier," and Red-Hand held up his hand so that the moonlight revealed its crimson hue.

Again he went on:

"But I was only half-avenged, for Boyd Bernard still lived.

"What destiny ever led my footsteps into these hills, God only knows; but here, five years ago, I met Boyd Bernard—and killed him."

"Ha! tell me, Vincent Vernon, tell me—is the grave in the Haunted Valley that of my son?" said the old hermit, eagerly.

"It is; I killed him, and for the sake of the happy days we had passed together in boyhood, I buried him, and carved his name upon a tree at the head of his grave."

"I knew of the grave, but never saw it—never knew that Boyd lay buried there, for I thought he had gone East with Grace," muttered the old hermit.

"Tell me, Carter Bainbridge," continued the Scout, "did Boyd Bernard come here with you?"

"Yes; I fled here in fear of my life, for I have been a great sinner, and Boyd and Grace came with me; but we had a quarrel, and they left, as I believed to go East, and—"

"And they settled in the Haunted Valley; and there they lived until I killed Boyd Bernard, and yet poor Grace still remained alone, to watch his grave, until last night she fell by her own hand, as this scout knows."

"Ay, tell by her own hand, and we two buried her there in the valley."

"Then I sought the cabin where they lived, and the papers I found there told me all; yes, that Boyd Bernard had slain the father of my wife, and then placed the crime at my door to have me hung, and that, believing the story told her, Grace had fled, a guilty thing, from my love; but I have forgiven her all."

"Ay, more did I learn, and that is that this maiden here—who has heard every word of my story, is my own daughter."

"Pearl, will you come to your father's heart?" Words cannot portray the tenderness with which Red-Hand spoke, and, comprehending the whole plot of crime against him, and feeling that he was indeed her father, the maiden sprung forward and nestled close in the arms of the man whose life had known so much of misery.

Not a word, not a motion marred the silent joy of that moment for those two, father and daughter, so cruelly divided through life, until at length Red-Hand turned once more to the old hermit, and said:

"Carter Bainbridge, I can now, in my joy, even forgive you."

No word of reply came, the eyes gazed straight at the moon with a fixed stare, and the voice of Lone Dick said, quietly:

"He's gone to another trapping-ground, comrade."

Instantly Paddy stepped forward, and feeling the lifeless pulse, said aloud:

"Thru' for you, Misther Lone Dick, he's off for Purgatory, and no mistake; and av he wasn't sich an ould sinner we'd be afther havin' a wake over his bones."

"He's not worth it, Irish; wait until I am hung and then have a fandango over me," bitterly laughed the outcast son, Kansas King.

"Silence! let no man dishonor the dead," rang out sternly the deep voice of Red-Hand, as he turned and led poor Pearl into the cabin, to prepare for the return to the stronghold of the miners.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

In the shadow of the hill that sheltered his cabin, Carter Bainbridge, the Hermit of the Black Hills, found his last earthly hermitage—the grave.

Standing by, watching the burial of the hermit, was Pearl, leaning upon the arm of her father, and so intent were Tom Sun, Lone Dick and Paddy in digging the grave, and Edwin Archer in gazing upon the beautiful face and form of Pearl Vernon, that no one noticed the prisoner, Kansas King, quietly steal away, un-

til, when all was over and the party ready to go, they missed him.*

Search and pursuit were then useless, and mounting their steeds, awaiting them in the gorge, the party started for the miners' stronghold, where they arrived just at sunrise, and were greeted with wild hurrahs from all.

Tom Sun then accompanied Red-Hand and his daughter to the Haunted Valley, and while he went on to tell the glad tidings of victory to the anxious party in the secret retreat, the husband and the daughter halted at the grave of poor Grace, and guilty though she was, they sorrowed for her most deeply.

During the day the whole party of miners and settlers were gathered together at the stronghold, and most warmly was Pearl welcomed by Ruth Ramsey and all, when they heard the strange story of her eventful life, and hearty congratulations were bestowed upon Red-Hand in honor of his new-found happiness.

Toward evening Major Wells arrived with his squadron, and then it was made known to the invaders of the Black Hills that the country belonged wholly to the Indians, and that they must depart therefrom at once, and leave the red-skins in possession.

The greater part of the two bands were most willing to acquiesce, and the following day the entire party, accompanied by the cavalry, left the inhospitable, but beautiful land, and took up their march for the boundary of civilization.

During the march, Edwin Archer and Pearl Vernon were often together, and so also were Red-Hand, now known as Vincent Vernon, and Ruth Ramsey, and the result of this intimacy was that, shortly after their arrival at North Platte, there was an engagement entered into between each couple, to be consummated one year from that date.

Then were the two bands of invaders into forbidden lands scattered to the four winds of heaven—some remaining upon the frontier, among whom was Lone Dick, and who returned to trapping, and Paddy, who re-entered the army, under Major Wells, and Tom Sun, who now roams the Western plains one of the champion Indian-fighters of the age.

As for Captain Ramsey, he went East with his family, and purchased a home in Maryland; while Captain Edwin Archer started for New York to take possession of a fortune left him by a maiden aunt.

Tired of a wild life on the border, and rejoiced to have found a beautiful daughter, Red-Hand also left for New York, where he placed Pearl at school for one year, and then she became the bride of Edwin Archer, the same day that beheld Ruth Ramsey married to Vincent Vernon, and well I know that every reader of these lines will wish them happiness as they journey through life together.

*A white man, said to be chief of one of the northern tribes, is believed to be Kansas King.—BUFFALO BILL.

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